Rats in a Maze

by draylon

Summary

A romantic story set before and after the events of the book and the film, featuring Teddy / Andrew and fellow Shutter Island patient George Noyce.
Epilogue: Shutter Island

Chapter Notes

For a more comprehensive author’s note and apology to LaVioleBlanche, a couple of whose ideas I’ve done a blatant smash-and-grab upon, please see the end of the first chapter.

LaVioleBlanche, posting as snewts on tumblr has drawn some wonderful - if NSFW - art that accompanies this story - http://snewts.tumblr.com/post/82367064204 with clickable links following end of Chapter 1.

Now for some warnings: there are some derogatory to downright offensive comments and standpoints regarding homosexuality expressed by characters in this story, which is set in the 1950s and which therefore broadly reflect 1950s societal attitudes and values. These don’t in any way reflect the author’s views, but may be upsetting to some readers. In the story I also deal with issues surrounding mental illnesses coming from a position of basic pig-ignorance, very insensitively, and using TV clichés and a shed-load of disparaging and non-politically-correct (though as far as I can tell 1950s-accurate) terminology too.

As well as all that, many of the characters are constantly smoking and some of them swear quite a bit. Someone alludes to having had imaginary sex with an imaginary rabbit at one point, but it’s not integral to the plot. I think that’s about all the necessary warnings - until you get to the specific ones addressing some of the dodgier material contained in Chapter 6.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The last time Laeddis sees his friend George Noyce on Shutter Island is when the ferry that’s taking him back to the mainland, back to a productive life of non-criminal-insanity, pulls away from the quayside and begins its slow turn out around the east side of the island towards Massachusetts Bay.

Noyce, hunched in a borrowed overcoat, is a small figure that recedes swiftly as the boat makes headway into the channel and in the flat, dull light of a chilly April day, soon it’s difficult to make out much of him against grey backdrop of the dock. Still, Laeddis keeps his eyes on his friend for as long as he can, which isn’t even until the point he’s faded out from sight; Laeddis can keep his eyes fixed on Noyce only until the orderlies accompanying him decide they’re tired of standing about in the cold and damp and grasping Noyce by the elbows, turn him away from the quay and begin leading him back up the hill towards the hospital.

It’s not usual for long-term patients at hospitals for the criminally insane to be allowed to wish former patients from hospitals for the criminally insane a cheery bon-voyage on the day of their discharge from hospital, but Andrew Laeddis is a person for whom a lot of rules have already been broken and moreover his and Noyce’s parting – with one of them nearly frantic and the other, as ever, hollow, ashen-faced and mute – was anything but upbeat. In the final moments Andrew whispers to Noyce desperately, making promise after empty promise; that he’ll be coming back for him, if only Noyce will keep holding on; that it’s going to be all right. Andrew can’t seem to help himself, even though
by now it must be plain to both of them that he’s lying. It’s about six months too late for anything to turn out to be all right for George Noyce.

Because Noyce, standing shivering on the dock – Noyce, of necessity, can’t say anything at all.

Laeddis has been allowed an unusual degree of latitude during his final months at Ashecliffe because in various psychiatrists’ circles he has come to be something of a celebrity. In return for certain privileges – in this instance the chance to say goodbye, which he jumped at - he has agreed to waive what remain of his rights to patient confidentiality and his chief psychiatrist has plans to write about him, to write about the pathology of Andrew’s mental illness and his strange delusions and the unusual steps that were undertaken at the hospital to cure him of it. His doctor has plans for a series of Andrew-centric scholarly articles, followed by a newspaper serialization of his story to help raise much-needed funding - and then perhaps a lurid book.

As for Noyce, his case is so commonplace that it wouldn’t even warrant mention in one of the lesser journals specializing in minor psychiatric disorders. The only point of interest regarding George Noyce being in relation to his involvement in the infamous Laeddis case, and in that he appears briefly, and only as footnote.

Clickable link to snewt's wonderful artwork of Teddy & George.... and another

and a link to A Drowning' - her excellent story that I based this one on

Chapter End Notes

For some time now I’ve felt that what the internet really needs is a Shutter Island fic – a very, very, long and rambling Shutter Island fic - all about possibly insane mental patient George Noyce. Given the likely fate of Noyce in the book and the film however, I couldn’t get my head round how to do it and not have the whole thing turn into a total downer throughout.

Long story short, a while back I was lucky enough to find LaVioleBlanche’s excellent, as-yet unfinished Noyce-fic ‘A Drowning’ on fanfiction.net. I owe LaVioleBlance a great deal of thanks because not only has she been kind enough to overlook the blatant, unsubtle plagiarization of content, but she’s also given me permission retrospectively (because I didn't manage to talk to her until I was already several chapters in) to shamelessly nick her ideas of a steamy relationship between
Teddy and George, following on from Teddy / Andrew not having undergone his lobotomy. So, I’ve gone with that and set about writing the bugger myself.

'Obvious, really,’ as a different, though coincidentally, also possibly insane screen-incarnation of George Noyce’s might say. Obvious once someone else has thought of it, at any rate.
Laeddis

It all went to hell about six months previously.

To clarify: the most recent incidence of things all going to hell occurred about six months previously. The real turning point came more than two years before that, when Laeddis’ world – in many ways quite literally – ended. Now there is nothing to go back to. The bare facts are that Dolores was killed by Andrew’s own hand after their poor children were by hers, and in the face of such devastating tragedy how could there be anywhere left to go? The murders took place in 1952 and since then, having no pieces of his former life to pick up, Andrew’s only really been marking time.

Approximately six months ago the doctors responsible for Laeddis decided they’d had enough of him cooling his heels in mental hospital and elected to start him out of his two-year case of delusions and apathy by means of a bizarrely elaborate piece of group-theatre; a kill-or-cure experiment, so to speak. Ashecliffe Hospital – or rather the whole of Shutter Island formed the backdrop for the play; the doctors, guards and patients the main cast and supporting players.

Laeddis, in a way, was the star of the show. Having retreated from the sordid circumstances of his real life and into fantasy, he was led by his doctors – led by the nose - through a series of living tableaux that forced him to recognize, confront, and ultimately acknowledge his own deluded state. Sleep-walked over the course of two days through a real-world real-time role-play, Andrew ranged far and wide across Shutter Island, taking in the immediate environs of the prison, some precipitous cliffs, a nearby lighthouse, and even a power-blackout during a tropical storm. Everyone on the island bar Andrew was in on the deception, and even under the duress of working under spontaneous and difficult conditions, all of them – with one notable exception – played their part exceeding well.

The desired end result of all this was to have been a functionally sane, if remorse-filled, recovering patient and in that respect the charade was successful so far as it went; Laeddis did slowly come to accept that his make-believe world was not all as he’d thought it to be. As an effective treatment however, the experiment could only be said to have been a partial success because at the end of it Andrew – in his right mind for once, conscious and fully aware of what constitutes consensus reality still rejected it, preferring to cling to his delusions outright.

After the failure of their next-to-last-resort strategy to produce a lasting cure, Laeddis’ doctors felt they had no choice but to pencil him in for a short course of experimental brain-surgery. Andrew, however, was saved at the eleventh hour by nothing less than a sheer force of nature – an act of god in the form of a second power-cut, that hit when the opposite arm of the hurricane made landfall on Shutter Island a day and a half after the first.

In the interim when the lights are out Laeddis’ doctors have the chance to rethink their strategy and his treatment is scaled down considerably. A short course of electroconvulsive therapy - unpleasant, but necessary, is prescribed, and if Andrew comes out the other end of it with more holes in his short-term memory than recollections of recent events remaining intact, or if the treatments leave him dazed and severely confused, at least he’s no longer insisting his name is something it isn’t, and more importantly for the time being he’s admirably subdued.

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Some of the doctors at the hospital set great store on the calming / healing influence of nature or some other such Mittle-European hogwash and so Andrew’s been sent to while away an idle hour or two out in the grounds of the hospital. He’s found a nicely secluded spot behind a hedge down by
the lake, where he can sit by himself muzzy-headed, just staring into space.

Andrew’s not been there long before the September sky clouds over and it looks like soon it’ll be beginning to rain. He’s thinking hazily about going back indoors – if only he could get over the weariness and lethargy that keep rooting him in place, when he hears two sets of footsteps slowly approaching and realizes he’s about to have company in his hiding place.

Laeddis recognizes Martyn, one of the hospital guards escorting a smaller man, a patient – straitjacketed, his head hanging forwards and eyes downcast. Martyn’s keeping a long-suffering sort of pace with his charge and in this way the pair go shuffling very slowly past, on into the wintry afternoon. For a minute Andrew watches their progress – which is anything but leisurely, owing to the fact that the man seems unwilling, or unable, to lift his feet very far off the ground. And perhaps because of the fog still lingering in his head, it honestly takes him that long to recognize the other inmate as being a former friend of his, George Noyce. On the other hand perhaps he doesn’t recognize him because Noyce looks terrible: dead man walking wouldn’t even begin to cover it. He looks like the husk of something that’s been hollowed out and left hanging to dry in the wind and the sun. Noyce is undersized in general: there was never much of him to begin with, but now he’s been so further diminished that the deceptive bulk of the straitjacket seems all that’s keeping one of the stronger gusts of wind from sweeping him sideways, right off his unsteady, staggering feet and straight into the lake. He looks like he’s already a ghost.

Following the overwrought episode in the lighthouse, where revelations about his true character (or lack of it) took place and then the difficult events in their wake, lately Andrew’s been having a lot to deal with and has forgotten all about George Noyce. Now he’s off his bench and in a couple of steps, catching up with him. “Georgie!” he says, surprised for a moment by the warmth and note of genuine affection he hears in his own voice.

Noyce doesn’t speak. Doesn’t look up.

“George!” Laeddis repeats and after that he’s the one recoiling back, because then Noyce does – not look at him exactly; just squirms his shoulders and twists his neck to swing his head up and around, in an uncomfortable-looking kind of nervous tic that Andrew suddenly finds he’s so familiar with it might almost verge upon being endearing, except for the fact until this exact moment, he had no recollection of ever having seen Noyce do it before. That’s unnerving, sure, but only a little – despite the fact that it’s also obvious the movement’s not something that’s anywhere near being under Noyce’s voluntary control.

Noyce twists his neck and swings his head, dull eyes sliding over and straight past Andrew, obviously registering nothing about his surroundings at all – and that doesn’t, in itself, leave Andrew horrified either because Ashecliffe, in its role as a hospital for the criminally insane, employs a whole range of drug and treatment therapies that are intended - almost by definition – to work to leave patients wearing varying degrees of blank looks.

No. What horrifies Andrew is that this is the first point at which he gets a good look at his friend’s face.

The day Hurricane Carol first struck the island is the last time Laeddis saw Noyce, and at the time he’d just been badly beaten about the upper body and head. That hurricane was five days ago, which means the first crop of bruises and ugly swellings have had time to begin to subside. Something else has been done to Noyce in the interim however, something violent and invasive that’s left him with his eyelids painfully puffed and swollen almost shut, completely unresponsive, and with huge, purple-black bruises encircling each eye.

Feeling a sick pull in his chest Andrew realizes that while he’s been sitting around recovering and
chatting about his feelings, and lying on psychiatrists’ leather couches and chewing the fucking fat, his friend – whose existence, until this moment he’d more or less forgotten about – has been having a brutal and untested medical procedure performed upon him, against his express wishes and without his consent.

Noyce has been the extremely unwilling recipient of a trans-orbital lobotomy, a procedure that has involved hammering a sharp spike (sometimes called an ice pick because that’s essentially what it is) through his upper eye-sockets and two inches in, to scramble the frontal lobes on either side of his brain. It’s a psychosurgical quick-fix: the entire operation takes but ten minutes, can be performed by inexperienced personnel, and is so straightforward to implement that a Dr Walter Freeman, the psychiatrist who developed it, felt able to successfully hone his surgical skill by initially practicing his radical new technique for brain surgery upon, amongst other things, ‘a whole carload of grapefruit.’

Intended to ameliorate difficult to outright psychotic behaviour, trans-orbital lobotomy is by its nature inherently imprecise and yields wildly unpredictable results.

“Jesus,” Andrew says, looking the lobotomized man up and down. He confronts Martyn, the guard. “Look at him! Should he even be outa the infirmary?” He gestures at the strait-jacket. “An’ why’s he haveta wear that?”

Martyn doesn’t need to give an answer because Andrew’s only another crazy patient, but he’s one of the ones you can actually talk to, he’s had some amusing conversations with....at least one of Laeddis’ personas in the past, and fuck it, he’s bored out of his skull with all this ‘escort-the-catatonic-patient-very-slowly-around-the-lake’ shit.

“Over in the old country,” he tells Laeddis, “after they operate Dr Naehring says they like to be able book ‘em outta hospital and send ‘em home that same week, an’ ‘most of them do just peachy. Got him thinking how scheduled activity might help shorten the patient’s recovery. Now he wants us to try a test of his hypothesis. But -” he tugs at one of the straps on the side of Noyce’s restraints – “this dumb fuck just won’t stop flailing and thrashing his arms about. Gonna hurt himself, one a’ these days.”

Martyn explains this in a way that shows he’s just repeating some spiel of the doc’s; reading between the lines what he’s really saying is that this – this unconscionable mess they’ve made of Noyce has been for nothing more than the sake of another goddamn experiment. Laeddis swallows down his rising ire and says - “he don’t look well enough to be up and walking to me.”

“No, he really don’t. Doctors’ orders, but. What can you do?”

“Can’t you let him sit with me a minute?” Laeddis is beside himself, sounds distraught.

Martyn considers this request while he checks his pocket for a packet of smokes. There’s no next of kin listed on Noyce’s intake form and sure, Martyn’d get chewed out for it if it happened, but on the other hand reliable guards are a lot harder to come by than patients, at Ashecliffe Hospital for the Criminally Insane, so it’d be no great loss in the scheme of things if Nervous Noyce ends up floating face-down in the lake, and what’re the chances of that happening in the next five minutes anyway, really? “Yeah,” he tells Laeddis. “Sure. Why not?”

He turns Noyce round and steers him back to deposit him on the bench Laeddis was sitting upon, telling Laeddis he’ll be back after his cigarette break.

“George,” Andrew says once Martyn’s gone, his voice cracking a bit. He can’t stand to look at him like this. The last time he saw Noyce he’d been locked in a cell in Ward C, the wing for hopeless cases, in the dungeon -
(Yeah, an honest-to-god dungeon because they’ve never done things by half on Shutter Island)

And even after everything that had happened - what Teddy had done, Noyce had still been straight as a die with him - had told the truth to Laeddis like no-one else in that whole damn fucked-up charade dared to. Through the bars, George insisted that Teddy was just a rat in a maze and pleaded with him, reasoned with him and flat-out begged him to remember, to try and see through the ridiculous psychodrama being played out around him, and he’d wept at the thought of being taken to the lighthouse, trembling in fear of – well, exactly this. Then, when Teddy wouldn’t listen, Noyce just sat back down on the floor and even as he wished Teddy better luck on his non-existent fools’ venture he’d been quietly giving up on himself – and hasn’t what’s happened shown he’d been dead right to do that? Teddy assured Noyce he’d save him; more empty promises, and at the very least maybe he could’ve made more of an effort to remember the lies he’d been telling him about that.

So, Andrew puts his arm round Noyce’s shoulders because there’s nothing else he can do, and after a moment, because the smaller man doesn’t make any kind of response at all, pulls him up against his side and then because he still doesn’t know why, but for some reason it feels like exactly the right thing under the circumstances, carefully tucks Noyce’s head into position under his chin so he can rest his cheek on it and get both arms all the way around him. With his face pressed to Noyce’s bare, warm, scalp, Laeddis doesn’t know where it’s coming from, but is struck once again by a disconcerting, almost overwhelming sense of familiarity. That straitjacket though, he finds a definite anomaly; he realizes that he’s become accustomed to being able to feel George’s bony shoulders through his shirt when they sit together like this; knows he ought to be able to rub his fingertips up and down the ridges and bumps of Noyce’s spine because once you’ve figured out some of the tricks, soothing the high-strung bastard’s not so difficult really, and it’s always good to be able to get him to calm the fuck down.

Laeddis wonders absently when on earth comforting George Noyce became something to feel good about - but it’s such a miniscule list these days, the number of things that make Laeddis feel even remotely at peace with himself that he decides it’s best put out of mind and not to worry about it any further. And so they sit side by side, Andrew doing his best to share his coat with Noyce, who’s shivering slightly against his chest, because there’s a cold wind blowing and the poor devil isn’t even wearing socks.

All too soon Martyn’s back. He starts laughing when he sees them like that.

“Break it up, lovebirds,” he says, but affably, pulling Noyce to his feet. For a split second Andrew thinks he sees a flicker of – something – twitch across Noyce’s face, and the smaller man seems almost to try to cleave to him; but then the moment passes and Laeddis realizes it’s only wishful thinking and like so many things, he must be imagining it after all.

Noyce is taken back to the hospital.

And that’s that.
George Noyce’s part in Laeddis’ story starts in the summer of 1954, at a time when he is incarcerated as a long-term prisoner at a facility in Massachusetts.

Every aspect of Noyce’s appearance and behaviour would seem to mark him out as being an easy target. He’s an unremarkable-looking man; balding, small and slight, with a thin face and a diffident manner: quiet, and very easy to overlook. Once they do notice him however, each and every new intake at the prison seems to assume he’s fair game, and they continue to do so even as the old hands who already know Noyce skirt round him because they also know vicious and single-mindedly lethal he is in a fight. He’s had good reason to learn how to be: Noyce gets into an awful lot of fights.

So, when he’s called to the Head Warden’s office on a morning in early June it’s far from being his first visit. What he can’t manage to do is think of anything he’s done to provoke this latest summoning; his recent record, as far as he can remember, is pretty clear. If George ever had an ounce to spare of optimism in his make-up it’s been well-extinguished by the circumstances of his life up until this point, but as he stands waiting to see the warden he’s about as confident as he ever is about anything that this situation isn’t especially likely to turn out badly for him.

George’s confidence, tentative as it is in this, turns out as usual to be completely misplaced.

Earlier in his stay at Dedham Prison, Noyce spent about nine months on referral as a patient at Ashecliffe Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Nine months around and about; it might have been as few as six months or could be as many as twelve; Noyce honestly doesn’t know because try as he might he’s never been able to make much sense of his memories of the place and there are long stretches of time before and / or after he was sent there that he’s simply unable to account for.

When the warden informs him that he’s to be referred back to the hospital for an indeterminate period Noyce is hard-hit. This isn’t a punitive measure: it’s not the result of anything he has or hasn’t done, but a special petition has been made for his presence and the warden tells him it’s a request he’s inclined to permit.

The thought of being sent back to Shutter Island fills Noyce with – a quite understandable and completely reasonable degree of – abject terror. As a result of his previous experiences at Ashecliffe his control of his emotions is sketchy at best – and he prostrates himself in front of the warden, weeping and wringing his hands as he begs for clemency.

When it’s clear that no reprieve is to be forthcoming Noyce makes a break for it. He’s chained hand and foot, as is usual for inmates visiting administrative areas of the penitentiary, but such is the speed and energy of his bid for freedom that having clumsily vaulted the warden’s desk, he breaks a window and even manages to squirm his head and shoulders partway through the broken pane before the guards accompanying Noyce have the presence of mind to begin attempting to recover him.

He’s beaten and dragged to the waiting prison van, vigorously resisting every step of the way. Finally a series of blows to the back of the head stun him and when he next comes to himself Noyce finds he’s been chained again, to a bench in the cabin of the Shutter Island transport ship; a position he remembers only too well from his last visit. The reality of his situation, as Noyce realizes that he’s
really going back to that terrible place makes him light-headed with fright and he first tests, then proceeds to fling his full body-weight over and over against the restraints. His first flush of panic soon passes. Noyce knows he’s no hope whatever of freeing himself but after a while the pain from his efforts, which wrench his joints and strip the skin from his ankles and wrists, helps him drag his scattered thoughts back into focus. It’s an old, well-remembered trick.

At length the racket he’s making draws the attention of his on-board attendants, two orderlies from the hospital. One subdues Noyce, trapping him against the bench in a practised full-body lock and holding him in place while the other drags down the waistband of his trousers and his shorts and unceremoniously administers a syringe-full of knock-out dose straight into Noyce’s buttocks. He doesn’t know what they’ve injected him with but as the chemicals flood his system the resultant wave of – not euphoria or even forgetfulness - just....plain....apathy that runs through him is very familiar and he’s sure he remembers them using this stuff on him at the hospital from before; when they were finished observing or taking notes for the day and wanted to bring him down from whatever new, untested and mind-altering preparation he’d been hopped up upon. It leaves Noyce incapacitated; conscious but more or less immobile. He remains aware that on some level he’s still angry, anxious and afraid but the drugs have a disassociating effect and make it difficult for him to care.

The rest of the boat trip and transfer by car to Ashecliffe Hospital pass in a haze. Noyce is first taken not to the secure wards but up to the great house on Shutter Island. This is a palatially-styled, Civil War-era mansion that was once a prison governor’s residence. Currently it’s serving as on-site accommodation for the doctors from the hospital.

At the entrance to a rather grand reception room the guards leave Noyce waiting on the threshold and go over to stand beside the head-honcho head-doctor, who is seated at a desk on the far side. Noyce hears himself let out a small, shivering noise that embarrasses him and clenches his teeth to stop it because that – the thought of being back here - isn’t remotely funny; although something to do with the drugs, with coming round from the sedatives they’ve shot him with is making him not care as much about his situation as he knows he ought to.

The doc’s a dapper man, wearing a bow-tie and dressed in a brown three piece suit. He’s of an age with, and has even less hair on his head than Noyce does himself - which means he’s to all intents and purposes, bald. He sits for a moment, watching Noyce where he’s standing in the doorway, watching Noyce fidgeting and ducking his head - assessing him with a curious, detached, expression. Over the years George has become extremely accustomed to having prison psychiatrists look at him like this.

Introducing himself as Dr Cawley, the dapper doctor stands up behind his desk, the two attendant flunkies still flanking him one at each shoulder, as if he’s at that much of a risk from manacled, shackled, Noyce. Cawley asks if he can call him ‘George’ and invites him to take a seat on a low folding chair that’s set out in front of, but at some distance back from his desk. The highlights on the ceiling and goose-neck lamps on the table are all discreetly angled so they’ll shine onto and into the eyes of anybody sitting in that particular spot. It’s possible that this is just the result of a chance or random effect.

But Noyce knows a power-play when he sees one; over the years he’s come under the scrutiny of enough psychologists and psychiatrists and what-have-you to have come to understand that they all of them, to a man, get off to some extent on the control aspect of the doctor / patient relationship. It’s most noticeable in the shrinks - or maybe they just don’t bother trying to hide it so much. This guy might as well be jiggling his dick in Noyce’s face.
All right then. So Noyce strikes painstakingly out over the vast expanse of brightly-coloured carpet that stands between him and his intended seat, shuffles into the glare of the too-bright lights, only able to move in awkward baby-steps owing to the restraints on his feet. He sits down on the (lightweight, aluminium-framed, no good for throwing through anything) chair, feeling thoroughly exposed with nothing but luxuriant carpet on all sides, and between him and the head shrink, an acre of carpet plus the full breadth of what looks like about eight to ten yards of highly-polished mahogany desk. Noyce crosses his ankles, looks down at his hands in his lap, and waits.

One of the orderlies shoves him on the shoulder to get his attention and offers an open pack of cigarettes. Noyce takes one and fingers it nervously while he waits for the guard to light it.

Then while he’s smoking his cigarette, Cawley tells him how it’s going to be. Noyce has been brought here to be a plant. There’s another patient at the hospital that Noyce has met before, one Andrew Laeddis, and Noyce is going to be bunked up with Laeddis and do his best to befriend Laeddis, to spy on Laeddis and then report back to Cawley, who is the doctor in charge of Laeddis’ case.

Noyce draws heavily on his cigarette. He hasn’t had a smoke in a long time and it’s doing funny things to his head.

“Laeddis? Never heard of him,” he tells Cawley, which, given all the trouble they’ve gone to in getting him here, probably isn’t the smartest thing for him to say at this point.

Cawley remains unfazed. “In July of 1952 you and Laeddis were inmates at Dedham jail in Massachusets. Prison records show that both of you spent time in the infirmary wing towards the end of the month.” He claps his hands together, making Noyce jump. “George! Do you have any recollection of that?”

Yes, Noyce remembers. He’d had emergency surgery for abdominal trauma following an accident (that was no accident) out on the prison farm. “I dunno Doc,” he answers. “If you say so. See, I’d just had a tractor run me over. I was pretty much out of it a lotta the time, there.”

“The records also show you and Laeddis were the only patients admitted to the ward, at least for the first part of your stay. Under the circumstances it’s quite likely you would have had some kind of interaction. And - ” the doctor smiles blandly – “it’s been confirmed by some of the nursing staff that even over the short time you spent together, the two of you appeared to become quite –” he breaks off again, as if searching for the right word – “close.”

The doctor hands a snapshot to the other orderly who, like a nice little messenger-boy, goes tripping all the way over the dreary intervening wastes of Persian carpet just so he can bring it to Noyce.

Noyce takes the photo and examines it for a moment, trying to hide his surprise. It shows a scowling, intense-looking young man wearing a striped prison jacket. Not yet middle aged – which means he’s a good few years younger than Noyce, he is squinting out of the picture, a desperate expression on his face. Noyce has to admit that actually, it’s a pretty good likeness.

“Him? That’s not Laeddis. He said his name was Daniels, Teddy Daniels,” he says.

Something about this seems to please the doctor immensely. “It’s him,” Cawley confirms with some satisfaction. “Andrew Laeddis is his given name, but he often prefers to refer to himself as Edward – or rather ‘Teddy’ Daniels -” he breaks off, waving his hands back and forth in an excitable, dismissive gesture, “an alias, but it’s all one and the same.”

“What’s this guy supposed to’ve done that you want I should spy on him?”
Cawley shakes his head, giving Noyce another bland smile. He isn’t saying. Tells Noyce that he will do as exactly as he’s been told and that this is all he’s in a position to need to know about. George will gain Laeddis’ confidence, find out what Laeddis is thinking – really do his best to get inside his head - and then he’ll report everything, every seemingly-insignificant detail, back to Dr Cawley, otherwise -

“Or else what?” Noyce echoes, weakly.

“George,” Cawley says, “you’re an old friend of the hospital’s,”

– (which, Noyce thinks, is one way of putting it) -

“and I shouldn’t have to spell this out for you because I’m sure you remember how we like to do things here. You’re nearing the end of your prison sentence - as I’ve no doubt you’re very well aware, but following your readmission as a - special patient at this hospital, you’ll fall under our complete jurisdiction until such a time as we decide otherwise. To put it bluntly we own you, George, and given the alternatives, wouldn’t you say it’s going to be in your best interests to co-operate?”

Cawley pretends to give Noyce a moment to think about it. “Do we have an understanding?”

George does understand how they do things at the hospital; out here on the island and hidden away from prying eyes the doctors have free rein to do anything and everything to the patients that it occurs to them to do; psychopharmaceutical testing, experimental therapies, corrective surgery – nothing’s off the menu and even if he didn’t remember from before, now the doctor’s making that perfectly clear. And as for ‘special patients’ – well, that means men like Noyce, people lacking friends and relatives who care about them on the outside; throwaway cases, whom no-one will miss. Noyce understands all of that and he nods his head mutely, looking down at his feet. There’s not a lot else he can do.

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After his interview with the doctor the orderlies take Noyce to the main hospital building, unchain him and have him change into a set of the drab, navy and grey clothes worn by patients at Ashecliffe. He’s supplied with a spare set, escorted to Ward A, the men’s ward, and taken to the room he’s to be sharing with Laeddis.

The door to the cell’s halfway open and the orderly accompanying Noyce bangs on it peremptorily. “Laeddis!” he shouts, “gotta room-mate for you!” and then holding the door for Noyce – “feel free to make yourself at home.”

It’s still the hour set aside for lunch and not yet time for one-to-one patient / psychiatrist sessions, outdoor-time, or for group therapy. Laeddis is lying on his bunk, and pointedly ignoring his new room-mate – not even looking at him - pretends to read a six-month old issue of a lifestyle magazine while Noyce stows his new belongings in his locker. He’s now the proud owner of two of everything, including two pairs of prison-issue shoes.

‘Befriend Laeddis’ are Noyce’s instructions, so he supposes he’d better get started. He goes and stands by the other man’s bed.

“Look,” he tells Laeddis, shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot, “I, ah – I’m sorry this means you’re going to haveta share your room.”

Laeddis glances up from his magazine for a moment, regarding George without much interest.
“Forget about it,” he’s saying, and then suddenly he’s up and jumping to his feet, beaming at Noyce with a wide, honest-to-goodness boyish grin.

“George!” he says, grasping Noyce’s hand and shaking it. He clasps him affectionately on the shoulder, eagerly searching his face. “Georgie, my man! I can’t believe it’s you!”

Noyce just blinks back at him, not even sure what type of an expression, though odds are it’ll be something unsightly-looking, awkward and pained – he’s got on his face. He’s at a loss for words, having been completely wrong-footed by the unexpected warmth of Laeddis’ welcome. Laeddis is honestly, obviously, delighted to see him – a reaction he finds jarring, because nobody’s ever happy to see Noyce.

“You remember me, then,” he says.

“Course I do! Ah, Georgie – not that it ain’t great to see you again an’ all, but last I heard you were coming up for parole – shoulda’ been home by now, home and clear! Whatever didya do that they went and sent you back here?”

Noyce shrugs his shoulders. Shuffles his feet and squirms a bit.

“Yeah, yeah, I know there’s things you just can’t ask. You told me that before.”

“Yeah, back at Dedham,” Noyce replies and cocks his head. “What’s with this ‘Laeddis’ business? Thought your name was different –“

“I was working undercover,” Laeddis says, without missing a beat, “on my investigation.” And then out of the corner of his mouth in a theatrical stage-whisper tells George: “I still am.”

What he’s said makes Noyce’s heart feel like it’s sinking into his feet because he’s been here less than two minutes and it’s already obvious Laeddis is so far-gone he’s got himself completely believing every word of his own bullshit.

Laeddis sits back on his bunk comfortably, bracing his hands on his knees. “So, you weren’t expecting you’d be sharing with an old pal, eh?”

“Nah,” Noyce tells him weakly, “kinda had this feeling I might be running into you.”
George Noyce has a problem.

His problem is sitting on the bunk opposite, taking a long, slow pull on his cigarette as he watches Noyce intently, through narrowed, clear green eyes. Raking his hair back from his forehead with a leisurely, one-handed stroke he purses his lips and directs a quick stream of smoke up towards the ceiling. Then he repeats his question.

His sandy brown bangs are longer than they used to be at Dedham, and have a tendency to fall forwards across his face. Having slicked his hair back he gives it a careless ruffle into place and as he turns to him with warm, easy smile George’s stomach turns over a little bit and he has to make a conscious effort not to stare.

“So whaddya say,” Laeddis is asking him, “you an’ me against the world, eh, Georgie-boy? What I know’s gonna bust this place open at the seams! I’ll be out’a here any day now an’ when I get out I’m bringing you with me, okay?”

It’s a trickier question to answer than it would seem to be taken at face value, because when Laeddis starts talking like this Noyce knows he’s no longer - strictly speaking - Andrew Laeddis anymore. The unfortunate Laeddis - who really is hopelessly deranged, has come to believe, sporadically, that he’s a law enforcement agent named Teddy Daniels, a United States Marshal who’s working undercover to expose illegal activities and covert government plots ongoing at Ashecliffe Hospital for the criminally insane. In his surprisingly robust and intricately-constructed fantasy, Daniels is only posing as a patient as part of his investigation, and Noyce – well the boundaries sometimes shift and are always blurry, but Noyce has come to be something along the lines of his trusted informant stroke sidekick, cum-loyal, number one confidant.

The rest of time Laeddis is plain old Andrew Laeddis, a violent criminal offender, convicted and committed for having emptied a revolver into his wife’s chest at point-blank range.

(In order to ‘set her free,’ as Laeddis insisted over and over in the course of his defence; so it’s little wonder they all thought he’d gone completely fucking nuts.)

Even in this grisly, if somewhat more likely real-world scenario, Noyce, remarkably, remains his trusty sidekick and confidant. That never seems to change; Teddy and/ or Andrew’s trust and faith in George are apparently unshakeable, no matter which of them he thinks he is. In this respect Laeddis’ doctors have chosen their spy well: the tentative bond that began to form in the infirmary at Dedham prison is quickly re-established and strengthens day by day as the two men, thrown together, turn to each other for companionship and support.

As for George – as much as he tries to keep his eye on the bigger picture, the vague hope of release from hospital and one day, even freedom, maybe, that’s been dangled in front of him like a carrot from a stick it’s difficult to hold onto, in the face of Teddy’s sheer force of personality. It’d be easy, if George was a harder, strong-willed man, or if he could hold himself to a more Machiavellian strategy, but he knows he’s always been soft-hearted and weak. So when Teddy takes his arm and pulls him aside to murmur his conspiracy theories, or catches his eye to joke with him, or nudges him under the cafeteria table with his foot, it’s not easy for George to keep in mind that he and Laeddis
aren’t friends, really. And, through the long watches of the night when they’re locked up in their cell, frightened and alone and Laeddis – quite clear in his mind for once of who he is and with the knowledge of his crime weighing heavy on him is overwhelmed with grief and cries at last onto Noyce’s shoulder, weeping for his murdering wife and their lost children, he unhesitatingly puts himself in George’s hands, trusting him entirely. It’s at times like this that George can’t help but reciprocate.

This is Noyce’s problem.

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He might be a man on a mission, but no-one’s said anything to Noyce (or at any rate they haven’t said it to him specifically) about his mission being a secret, so he’s glad when he’s able to spill his guts to Teddy, an opportunity for which occurs around the end of the first week in.

It’s a nice day out. Laeddis has earned himself a privilege pass for good behaviour and as Noyce, until he’s told otherwise, is under strict instructions to stick with him, they’re strolling together by the lake.

Having a large body of standing water inside the grounds of a psychiatric hospital that’s home to many suicidal and suicidally-inclined inmates mightn’t seem to be the wisest choice in terms of brilliant ideas for garden design, but the lake’s been there since the governor’s house was built and, as it was originally excavated by prisoners from the nearby military fortress, it is in a way considered to be a piece of history and stands in its own right as a minor Civil War relict.

Also, as a sanguinary-minded sub-set of Ashecliffe doctors have been known to point out, for the really determinedly suicidal patient there are always other options; namely the deadly cliffs, jagged seashore rocks and freezing ocean currents that encircle Shutter Island, and in the all light of this, achieving death by drowning in an ornamental lake measuring less than two feet at its very deepest would surely take some quite concerted effort.

Strolling by the lake’s not really the correct term for what Noyce and Teddy are doing because, being outdoors and outside of the wards, they’ve each been fitted with a set of leg-irons, in line with hospital regulations. George, having not gotten the hang of walking properly in his as yet keeps tripping over his feet and has to adopt a fast-paced hobble to catch up with Daniels, who’s forging on ahead.

There’s a rustic wooden bench set in a little alcove that looks out over the water. It’s screened off from view of the main hospital by an overgrown cypress hedge. Daniels sits himself down and waits there for Noyce.

“You said you wanted somewhere private we could talk – so talk already,” he tells him.

Given his doctors’ interest in Teddy, and with a knowledge of how surveillance information is routinely collected at Ashecliffe Hospital, George has wondered if there might be microphones hidden in their cell. There’s likely to be none all the way out here however; for starters waterproofing would be a problem - so he grabs his chance and tells Teddy everything, starting with his first summoning at Dedham, then moving on to his interview with Cawley - and what the good doctor told Noyce he wanted him to do.

“They chose me,” he explains, “cause to begin with, I already knew you. An’ -” Noyce breaks off, an anxious look in his eye.

“And?” Teddy has to prompt, eventually.
Noyce makes a low, keening noise and puts his forehead on his knees because he doesn’t, doesn’t, doesn’t want to think about it –

“And -” he gasps, head bowed down and hugging his arms round his legs, “it could be on account of how I was a patient here before.”

“Well I know you were,” Teddy tells him. “Georgie, it was you first told me about this place, remember? The illegal experiments and what-not? That’s what got me started on my investigation.”

Noyce nods up against his own legs, forehead scratching on the rough fabric of his trousers. “Yeah. Yeah, but you don’t know,” he gulps, “cause I don’t see ‘em putting their hooks in you just yet. They get a hold a’ you an’ they can do terrible, awful things out here. Hurt you an’ - give you drugs that make you do – an’ see just - awful things – so when they put the squeeze on me this time Teddy, I swear I couldn’t help it, I- ”

Teddy pats his friend, who’s still sitting in his near-foetal tuck and looks like he’s about two seconds away from hyperventilating, fondly on the back. “Forget about it, Georgie,” he says. “You can go back an’ tell those doctors whatever the hell you feel like. I trust you – and you owned up an’ told me all about it, didn’t you? I know you’re on my side.”

Of a sudden Noyce, who’s been rocking his body back and forwards in an agitated manner not particularly indicative of either good mental health or emotional stability, goes very still. “But I sold you out already,” he snuffles, into the legs of his pants. “Ain’t you even mad at me or something?”

Teddy tsks. “Huh. They wanna spy on me so bad, just shows I must be getting to ‘em, eh?”

“Dunno if that’s exactly the way your docs are seeing it, Teddy,” Noyce says faintly, raising his head.

Daniels shrugs his shoulders. Sits George upright, scrutinizing his pallid features for a moment.

“Look at you,” he says gently, shaking his head. “Gotta try and stop worrying all the time, Georgie. It’s okay, really. Remember what we used to say in the infirmary? Back at Dedham? I’ve got you watching out for me, I know that.”

“Yeah, Teddy,” Noyce replies, with a wan smile, “I remember.”

There’s a pause.

“And?” Teddy adds expectantly, elbowing George in the ribs.

“And -“ and Noyce has to break off for a moment here, because even the idea sends a sensation of warmth rushing through him that he’s ill-equipped to deal with -

“And,” George mutters, voice little more than a whisper, “I’ve got you.”

“Damn straight,” Teddy says, pulling him closer on the seat and rearranging him so his head’s resting on Teddy’s shoulder. “You got me whatever happens, Georgie, so any time you’re feeling bad you just – think about it, okay? An’ try an’ remember that, too. ”

It’s warm, in the afternoon, in that sheltered little nook and the sunshine is drawing out a sweet, clean, resinous aroma from the dry cypress-needles under the hedge.

As it’s never very clear how much transfer of information is actually going on between the different facets of his friend’s personality, of course to be sure, Noyce knows he’ll have to find a way to
repeat his confession to Laeddis separately, at some later date. But that’s fine, because if there’s going to be any kind of justifiably paranoid reaction it’ll most likely be coming from Teddy, and informing Teddy is what’s really been worrying him. Preying on his mind, actually, and not just because of the guilt that comes from knowing he hasn’t had the guts to refuse to spy on his friend. Noyce has been in and out of prisons of one type or another for most of his adult life and is well aware how prison life treats snitches. He knows he deserves what’s coming to him, knows how to take a beating and is not afraid of pain; he’s just not so certain – given the way he’s already beginning to feel about him – that he could bear to take his punishment from Teddy’s own hand.

Noyce is expecting retribution, so it makes his head swim with confusion when he finds himself still sitting there, basking in the sun - and basking in the warmth of Teddy’s continuing affection instead; his friend Teddy, who’s started sweeping his hand in slow, kind, strokes down and down George’s back to steady him. Noyce hasn’t – he shudders and chokes a bit on the surge of fine and unfamiliar emotion that’s welling up in his throat because he knows that he in no way deserves - Noyce knows all too well what he is: no more than a wretched degenerate, an abject, pathetic excuse for a man, and he knows in his bones he’s no right whatever to be treated so decently as this.

Teddy, incredibly, doesn’t seem to notice. Just lets Noyce lean on him as they sit in the sun and keeps right on petting him.

“You feelin’ better yet Georgie?” he murmurs, then adds - “tell me if you think you’re gonna puke.”

*Dear reader, I couldn’t’ve put it better myself.
One of the more tedious aspects of insanity, when it comes to life in a mental hospital is having to sit through blow-by-blow accounts of all the other lunatics’ experiences of it.

Some of the younger doctors at Ashecliffe have been pushing for the inclusion of more modern psychoanalytical treatments in their patients’ regimes. The communal talk-sessions are a relatively new addition, referred to by the psychiatric nurse in charge of running them as ‘group therapy’ - or - “Just a bunch a’ cry-babies like to keep spillin’ their guts in public, Teddy,” which is what Noyce is calling it, and it’s only the start of his very first meeting. When George gets there most of the seats round the group-therapy table have already been taken but he fetches a chair over and after a bit of jostling, manages to shoe-horn a place for himself next to his friend. “These yahoos kinda get hooked on the attention, you know?” he whispers, by way of a much too audible aside.

He gets a good glare from Nurse Wanda – as they’re all on a first-name basis, here in group therapy - for that one. Teddy is surprised when he notes the reticent Noyce, who up until this point he’s only seen backing down from any form of confrontation at all times, openly glaring back at her.

Teddy spends the next five to ten minutes trying to figure whether it’s psychiatrists in general that George doesn’t like, if maybe he has a problem with people in positions of authority, or if he’s just carrying some kind of specific grudge directed exclusively and only towards psychiatric nurses. This certainly beats listening to Nurse Wanda outlining the value of the shared therapy experience, which she does in painstaking over-long detail, purely for George’s benefit: Teddy and the others have already heard her welcome speech before, as she delivers it each and every time they’re joined by a new patient. They’re up to.....nine members now, starting from three including Teddy, and the others have been approved fortnightly, one at a time. So you work out how many times Daniels has had to listen to her saying it.

Wanda is telling the group – telling Noyce – that there aren’t any rules in the unstructured, safe and above-all confidential environment of group therapy, save for the rule that all group members should be willing to contribute at least one piece of information to each meeting of the group.

“An’ why’s that?” George wants to know.

“It’s vital for our group’s structure and continued functioning that each person attending our meetings should be an active participant,” Wanda informs him brightly. Then she invites Noyce to get things started by telling them all something about himself.
“But I got nothing to say,” Noyce mutters, shifting in his seat.

Matty Wild jumps in. Matty was just another low-grade nasty piece of work, till the fateful night he broke into his grandfather’s gun-closet and took the entire contents along with him to the local drive-in.

Like Teddy, he’s been coming to the sessions since they started and always has a great deal of personal information he feels he needs to divulge: by now they’ve heard several of Wild’s own contrasting theories about what went so terribly wrong with Wild; details about Wild’s childhood, his family background - everything, even down to the dreams he had last night. At various stages they’ve each received notes on, and ideas and suggestions for Wild’s future psychiatric treatment - all hand-written on index cards submitted by Wild himself.

Perhaps Noyce is right: it’s possible these sessions are making Matty get a little navel-gazingly self-obsessed.

Right now Wild is telling them the story of his first sexual experience, a fabulous encounter that he claims took place when he was sixteen, and involved him being pleased at quite extraordinary length by a giant, human-sized, talking white rabbit named Beatrix that only Wild could see –

“Where’d you say you had this rabbit blow you, Matty?” a patient named Eddie interrupts. “Should maybe see if I can go there, catch me one of those!”

Eddie Baker’s a big, bluff man of fifty, and he’s another of the ones who’ll go to his grave insisting he’s got nothing wrong with him. Says he must’ve killed his wife and step-daughter by accident, and as he insists he’s no recollection of the event, claims he must have done it in his sleep. He might’ve been asleep - but if he was, you’d think the report from at least the first round of gunshots would’ve woken him right up. Definite weak point in the Eddie Baker version of events, that.

“Used to meet her at - my Aunt’s place! Uh! - upstate,” Matty pants, and it’s becoming clear to all that under cover of the therapy table, Wild has taken it upon himself to deal with the inflammatory effect that his reminisces have been having on him. “Yeah – in the back yard!” he groans. “Under the apple tree! Trixie’s fur was – uh! - so soft, an’ that’s where I – aah! That’s where I first took off her dress – “

Belatedly realizing that an insalubrious activity’s ongoing right under her nose, Nurse Wanda bolts up from the table and goes to summon help. As the attendants she fetches are manhandling Wild away and into seclusion, Wanda goes with them and heroically – in both a somewhat-literal and more metaphorical sense – grasps the nettle, as she struggles double-handed to try and make Matty leave hold of his dick.

But this therapy session hasn’t been tedious at all!

After that they all sit round the table for a minute in silence.

Then Eddie thumps his fist in front of him and says - “So! I still wanna hear from Noycie there. Remember how important it is we all make our contribution to the group? Wild’s not gonna get to tell us how his finishes. So won’t you please share with us, George, the tale of how you first got your cherry popped instead.”

“Wasn’t with a rabbit, was it Noyce?” one of the other patients prompts.

Noyce sits there rubbing his head for a while before answering. “Not that it’s any of your business, Eddie,” he says, “but I been in an’ out a’ nuthouses and prison and what have you since I was a kid
of eighteen. So what can I tell you – not got much of a story for the group I can ‘share’.”

“No? Suppose you wouldn’t have much luck romancin’ the ladies any a’ those places, wouldya? Not that good ol’ Noycie here, our pillow-biting pal, would have much idea what to do with one - ”

Noyce’s back stiffens. “What did you say?”

Eddie chortles. “Can’t you take a joke?”

Noyce jumps forward, slapping both hands down on the table with a shockingly loud report. All the colour’s drained from his face and he’s absolutely livid.

“Whaddid you just say to me!” he screams.

Eddie’s kicking his chair back as he gets to his feet, shouting. “I said, chances are you don’ even know which piece of a dame t’stick ya prick in, do ya, you dirty little faggot!”

And Noyce, murder in his eyes, is on top of the table and has launched himself straight at Eddie even before the big lug’s finished taunting him. Eddie’s got just under a foot and more than sixty pounds over Noyce in bulk but the smaller man topples him down like a nine-pin, hands gouging for his throat. Only a beat behind, Teddy’s already grabbing and trying to grapple his friend free but it’s no easy task and he has to acknowledge that for a small man, George is a powerhouse of aggressive intent, and frighteningly fast.

The orderlies come running; Teddy and Noyce and Eddie are still floundering on the floor and as they haul them apart Teddy sees that George’s teeth are bared and his face is wet and realizes the broken, animal noises he’s making are the sound of him weeping.
Warnings for decidedly dodgy content: Societal attitudes towards homosexuality in 1950s America are, well, a matter of public record really, as are the many dreadful ‘treatments’ that were misguidedly applied at various times in the attempt to ‘cure’ it. For this story I have bent the timelines slightly, as not absolutely all of the techniques - ‘corrective’ and otherwise - outlined in this chapter were definitely being applied as early as they would have been in the story; but unfortunately many of them were and as for the others, sadly, I haven’t had to change the timelines by very much at all. Nor have I gone overboard as regards any of the – quite literally shocking – details. I didn’t make any of this stuff up as there was no need to, it’s all lifted directly from actual psychiatric practices of the time. As it’s based on real-life material, inclusion of this type of content in a silly fanfic is undoubtedly in very poor and extremely questionable taste, and if you feel that way, I can only make my apologies: poor taste is kind of what I do.

After the orderlies break up the fight the three of them are dragged off and locked up separately; one cooling-off period and one brief interview with a very disappointed Dr Cawley later and Teddy’s taken back to their cell. George is already there, chewing his fingernails and pacing; looks like he’s been doing both for quite some time.

Teddy sighs as he sits down on his bunk. “You okay?” he asks Noyce, who gives him a terse little nod in reply - but doesn’t stop pacing. Teddy supposes they probably ought to have a talk.

“Was that true?” he begins, “what you said to that douchebag Eddie about being in an’ out a’ institutions since you were a kid?”

“Yeah. I guess,” Noyce says.

“Well! Go on then! How’d it happen? What’d you do?”

Noyce rolls his eyes and gives Teddy a disdainful look. “What, you writing a book? Told you before, Teddy. You land up in one of these places, there’s things you just can’t ask. You’ll get on the wrong side of someone, won’t’chu.”

“But I’m not asking just anyone,” Teddy counters, “I’m asking you. You really got anything better to do? Sit down a minute, why don’t you. You’re giving me a headache, up and down, up and down all the time like that. Sit down an’ talk to me.”

Noyce stops his pacing and hesitates for a moment. Folds his arms then lifts them high only to let them fall back down again in a nervous gesture that, as Teddy’s already come to recognize, means he’s got something he wants to get off his chest. Repeating the movement he sits down on the bunk beside him.
“What they put you away for, Georgie? The first time.”

Noyce doesn’t answer for a while. “Bird-watching,” he replies at last, and for a second Teddy’s waiting for the punch-line, because he could figure Georgie-boy for being an awful lot of things, but a card-carrying member of the Boston Chapter of Audubon’s great national bird-bothering society simply isn’t one of them. Just doesn’t seem like it could ever be his kind of thing. He can’t even sit still for two minutes to begin with; nervous type.

“You’re pulling my leg!” Teddy says, but the other man isn’t laughing.

“My freshman year at college I met a – nice kid. Nice looking. Good family. Very nice kid,” Noyce begins. But he suddenly clams up, chewing his lip and obviously considering whether he’s already said too much. Then he takes the plunge anyway. “I liked him,” he says, “and he liked birds, so what could I do? I joined the ornithological society.”

He watches Teddy nervously through his eyelashes, waiting for the inevitable outraged reaction. Nothing.

Even without what happened today, and even if Teddy hadn’t heard the other inmates calling Noyce ‘queer’ and ‘faggot’ and ‘fruit’ behind his back (but not usually when he can hear them, for obvious reasons) it’s not as if it’s something he wouldn’t have figured out for himself sooner or later anyway. Teddy’s met men like him before; there were plenty of them when he was over in Europe, plus one or two he fought alongside of in his unit, too. They don’t bother him, not really; he’s never been able to understand what all the fuss and moral panic’s about.


“And? Yeah?”

Noyce stares at him, looking flummoxed. “What’s the matter with you? It’s wrong, everybody knows that. Filthy – unnatural. Disgusting,” he mutters, exactly as if he’s reciting it by rote.

Teddy just shrugs his shoulders. Waits for Noyce to go on with his story.

“We took a trip to Cape Ann together,” George says at last. “Just him and me. Round the Christmas holidays? There’s some kind of fancy duck he wants me to see, maybe it was a goose –“

“You sure it wasn’t a loon?”

Noyce forces his lips into a tense little smile and he makes eye contact with Teddy for the first time since acknowledging his disgraceful secret. He’s still wound pretty tight, but Teddy can see his shoulders sag slightly the moment he realizes that Teddy is really and truly, not all that shocked.


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It had been harlequin ducks they went to see, he does remember, of course he does. (Noyce might have officially been declared insane, but he’s not mentally deficient, after all.) And he remembers the way the rafts of them would be tossed up and down on the ocean swell, paddling madly and at the same time always effortlessly buoyant, and he can still see in his mind’s eye their how their crisp, brightly patterned plumage contrasted against the clear grey of the ocean, and against the weed-covered, slick black rocks. Peter’s delighted laugh:
“Aren’t they something!” he says, and then he’s winding his arm round George’s waist and pulling him close like it’s nothing, like this isn’t the first time they’ve ever acknowledged this thing – whatever it is, this shameful, wonderful thing – between them. Peter’s hand is warm on his waist and when he brushes his lips against George’s it’s the first (and last) time Noyce has ever been kissed and shockingly, at this point he feels so elated that he can’t even bring himself to feel the tiniest bit ashamed about it.

(The requisite feelings of shame and humiliation start getting kicked into place not much later.)

Back on that chilly day in December and bad weather’s coming in; the dark skirts of a thunderstorm have drawn down to touch the sea over the horizon and great handfuls of scattered raindrops are already pitting the clean surfaces of the waves in front of them. George and Peter run, laughing, back to Pete’s car. They sit for a minute, just grinning at each other, then Peter pulls George into his lap because now they’ve made contact they can’t seem to get enough of it; Peter runs his hands up and down Noyce’s sides and his back and pays him many outrageous compliments.

George’s parents have raised him right, to be humble and god-fearing and to never think too highly of himself - and he doesn’t, so he knows that the wonderful things Peter’s saying to him can’t be accurate. But, on hearing the warm, steady sincerity of his words, shy, quiet, useless Noyce starts to feel the knot of apprehension, the worry that he’s not up to scratch that’s always been tight in his chest begin to unravel - another first - and, feeling flushed and bold for once, begins to caress Pete in return.

Then there’s an abrupt rap on the drivers’ side window.

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“We saw the ducks an’ it started to rain so we went back to the car. Maybe we were fooling around some. Just kids - necking, an’ maybe foolin’ around some, but that’s all,” Noyce explains, seemingly at pains to make this perfectly, unambiguously, clear. His whole face right up to the top of his forehead and even his ears and the back of his neck have turned an unattractive shade of bright red, and having little in the way of biteable fingernails left, as he speaks he’s absent-mindedly tearing away at skin on the sides of his fingertips with his teeth.

Teddy reaches over, pushes Noyce’s bleeding hands down into his lap and holds them there till his friend stops fidgeting.

Noyce looks up in surprise. “’M’I doing it again? Thanks, Teddy.”

“You asked, an’ I’m telling you, I didn’t touch him,” he continues, as if it matters, because now he’s started talking – though he very much wants to - he can’t seem to stop. “Only over his clothes. Never put my hands on him none. But a cop shows up and arrests us for public indecency, and the day after that my folks cart me off to the local nuthouse. They meet this shrink there – Slovak psychiatrist just come over, says it’s a disease an’ tells them he’s got the cure. So they say ‘that’s great, doc!’ and tell him to go to town on me.”

“That’s it? That’s the reason you got put away?”


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This is, however, how the young Noyce finds himself sitting in the outpatients ward of a psychiatric hospital, hooked up to a machine – the latest in cutting-edge technology, apparently – that consists of
a moving-pen monitor wired to a pressure gauge, wired to a transparent canister that’s sealed in place around the base of Noyce’s penis and is designed to measure changes in the size of it.*

He’s sitting in a chair in a darkened room, watching homosexual pornography. A slide-reel’s playing, and first they showed him women, and then they showed him men and women together, but now he’s being shown a bewildering array of images of men: men of all ages and shapes and sizes, naked and half-naked and sometimes alone or in pairs or even in groups and they’re touching themselves, or one another, or outright fucking and in some cases doing....things – with other things - he’s not even sure what.

George doesn’t like it. It’s all so base – the people in those photos seem divorced from any kind of real human emotion; it’s impersonal, and ugly. He’s never liked to think about, much less felt inclined to want to look at this kind of stuff at all, and yet he’s - and this mortifies him to the core, making him feel disgusted with himself, utterly awful – he just can’t help it. He squirms in his seat and tries not think about his...male part, how ridiculous it must look trapped inside that awful tube, tries not to think about how hard he’s getting because it’s so humiliating and he hates this, hates the thought of them monitoring and examining him like this, but he’s only just turned eighteen and a lot of the time the damn thing’s got a life of its own and he wants to, really wants to, but still can’t stop himself from being sort of turned on by some of it.

The session lasts for about a half an hour and Noyce is in tears well before the end. Afterwards his mother tells Szadz, his doctor, that George has always been a sensitive boy.

When it’s over the doctor helps George to unhook himself and once he’s calmed down, they have a conference with his parents to discuss the doctor’s findings, which indicate - he’s very sorry to have to inform Mr and Mrs Noyce - that their son George does indeed have something awfully wrong with him, as the test’s shown that he’s exhibited strong and marked and completely socially-inappropriate physical reactions to individuals of his own sex.

Now Mrs Noyce is crying too but George is perplexed: after what they picked him up for at the police station and all, how come she doesn’t know that already?

George’s father is a rock. George Noyce Senior is an engineer and has never met a problem that couldn’t, given enough time, sufficient faith and /or a hell of a lot of effort, be fixed. Squeezing his wife’s shoulders as she sits weeping inconsolably in the doctor’s office, he is a bulwark of husbandly support. He’s not a man who’s going to stand for having any son of his turn out to be queer, homosexual, or any other sort of deviant, faggot, or fairy, so he’s the one who has to ask the psychiatrist, ‘what next?’

The treatment phase is what comes after and aversion therapy’s in vogue as the new ‘cure.’ Psychiatric treatments go in and out of fashion like everything else and the latest fad involves administering electric shocks to patients while they view a series of images relating to the focus of their supposedly misplaced sexuality – which means more homosexual pornography, in George’s case. The goal of all this, as Szadz explains, is to provoke prolonged negative associations that will work to permanently nullify any inappropriate responses, thus correcting the recipient’s formerly deviant preferences.

They intend to shock him straight, in other words.

Dr Szadz tells George to relax, to try not to tense before the shocks come, but this is easier said than done. Noyce has to wonder if the fellow’s ever tried one of his treatments out for himself: five seconds is a long time when you’re being painfully electrocuted and no matter how hard you try, it’s difficult not to feel some natural degree of apprehension. He’s scheduled to receive twice-daily sessions that last a half an hour each, and although this might not seem like much, George begins
feeling anxious for some time before the start of each session, and afterwards remains being anxious in anticipation of the next one. So from the beginning of the first day of the treatment, he’s pretty much in a constantly apprehensive, nervous state.

A day or two into this and George can’t keep his food down or sleep and by the end of the first week is a nervous wreck. Mr and Mrs Noyce express their concern but Szadz, on the contrary, is pleased by their son’s progress; assures George’s parents that the technique is at its most effective when a patient is somewhat worn-down and fatigued as this renders a person far more suggestible, and that their son’s treatment is on course. This does much to allay their doubts.

On the first day of the second week Szadz proudly reveals a new piece of equipment. Previously the aversive shocks have been delivered via a pair of electrodes sewn into a rough canvas cuff that Noyce has been wearing on his non-dominant arm. The new equipment consists of something that looks a lot like a pair of shoes and following the realization that now he’s to receive shocks through the soles of his feet, George goes slightly off the rails. He begins to cry, but does so very quietly, because his mother is waiting in the doctor’s office, just next door to the treatment room. He puts the new shoes on, knowing all the while that he can’t make himself go through with this. Still crying he takes them off again. Szadz has stepped out for a moment for a word with George’s mother and they’re both outside and he cannot, cannot face them, which means he won’t be leaving by the usual route.

They have him sit in a chair when they’re administering the electric shocks, in case his nerves should go into spasm - as they often have done, and this causes him to fall. The seat they’ve provided, he thinks it might be made of teak, is a very heavy one - probably for much the same reason. Now Noyce takes hold of the chair, drags it across the treatment room and heaves it straight through the window, where the weight of it rips the mesh-reinforced glass out from the sides of the frame.

Noyce jumps out head-first after and hits the ground running; doesn’t stop till he’s hiding in a shrubbery a mile or two from the hospital in a park in an entirely different neighbourhood. He doesn’t dare come out again until after dark.

George can’t go home to his parents after this. He just can’t. So, for the next six months or more he sleeps rough, finding empty freight-cars when he can or bivouacking in one of the unused shipping warehouses out by the docks. The country’s economy is steadily worsening and there are soup kitchens being set up all over the city which means that most days, Noyce can manage to find more or less enough to eat. Food isn’t a grave concern but money’s still a problem however, because he needs it to buy drink; the stronger the better. Prohibition’s in full force but acquiring strong drink is still easy, especially for an emotionally unbalanced young man who spends much of his time down on the waterfront, by the hidden wharfs and crumbling quays where, on foggy nights, the rum-boats come in. More often than not through the spring and summer he’s able to pick up a day or two’s wages loading and unloading at the docks, but as the season wears on the work begins to dry up. As a result of his labours Noyce has developed an admirably lean, wiry physique, but owing to his short stature, he’ll never look much like a classic stevedore. As competition for places increases he finds he is passed over more and more, often in favour of the more traditional longshoreman types.

From time to time after this he wakes up of a morning with a fistful of notes clutched to his chest, and blood in his shorts and a vicious pain in his ass, or a soreness in his throat that lets him knows that last night he must have let himself been vigorously fucked in one or the other (or both), but the alcohol dulls Noyce’s senses – it’s the only reason he drinks it - and allows him enough forgetfulness to blank most of the details out. He doesn’t turn tricks often - finds the thought of sex disgusting; rarely gets hard and, though some of them have wanted to put their hands on him, never lets himself get off with a john (or indeed any other person) there. That much of Szadz’s treatment’s been a 100% success, at any rate.
Comes a rainy night at the end of August and young Noyce is mooching outside an unlicensed bar down on the waterfront, one of many anonymous local hang-outs for low-lifes and degenerates of all sorts, when a soft-voiced man, bespectacled and kind-of familiar, takes his arm and invites George to come in with him.

The night’s still young but Noyce already has the better part of a 12 ounce bottle of bootleg whiskey in him and is feeling comfortably numb. So, it’s not till they’re in the saloon have ordered their drinks and the man has hung up his hat, muffler and raincoat and is resting his hand on the small of George’s back as they sit down together in their booth that the drink-added Noyce is finally able to place him: it’s none other than Szadz, his doctor from the psychiatric hospital.

For a long, terrible moment he thinks Szadz has come to collect him, sits beside Szadz in the booth so frozen with panic he’s barely able to remember to breathe.

It turns out – becomes increasingly clear as the doctor works his other hand up George’s leg to rest at his groin - that taking him back to hospital is the last thing on this doctor’s mind. Two things occur to him as Szadz is delicately skirting around the question of ‘how much’ for the surprisingly varied sexual services he hopes George will be able to supply: firstly that the doctor hasn’t recognized him and second, that he’s obviously done this before.

As Szadz squeezes unsubtly at his crotch and moves in to kiss him Noyce vividly recollects the salutary little lecture on the evils of sodomy that the doctor had given him when he arrived for the first of his corrective treatments.

Using the grossest possible terms, he’d asked George if he realised how revolting homosexuality was, and how vile and abhorrent anal and oral sex were. He’d wanted to make Noyce feel disgusted with himself and had succeeded. The irony that Szadz shares disgusting proclivities of the exact same sort is not lost on Noyce and now he knows how does he feel? Pretty damn angry about it, actually.

He doesn’t remember breaking the beer bottle but he does remember jamming it up and into Szadz’s jaw as the doctor closes in to kiss him, remembers the blood flowing over his hand, running hot and wet down the sleeve of his shirt as he pulls the bottle free to slash frantically, again and again at Szadz’s throat. When he thinks about it, that dreadful moment seems to last far longer than it could’ve in reality but the rest of the evening is truncated and of what happens directly after he can recollect no more than a soft-edged, hazy blur. But he does remember Szadz’s gurgles and how he screamed when George was stabbing him, in an awful sort of counterpoint to somebody else very close by who’s alternately crying, laughing, and also screaming, like they’re some kind of hysterical maniac.

Yeah. Noyce supposes he must have had some kind of mental breakdown at around that point.

When the policemen come they take him to prison, and when they ask him if he’s sorry for what he’s done, George tells them ‘no’, starts laughing again and then can’t make himself stop.

This is why they put him in psychiatric hospital.

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Noyce doesn’t tell Teddy any of this; just describes how he took a broken bottle to his supervising psychiatrist’s face and tried to cut his throat. “’Cause he’d been my doctor is the reason they said they had to send me to the nuthouse,” he explains. “Owing to the nature of the prior relationship.”

“An’ did you do it?” Teddy asks. “Cut his throat, I mean.”
“Naw,” Noyce says. “Only got to about half-way. He’s scarred up pretty bad, but that joker lived.”

“Why’d you do it!”

Noyce rubs his head – another nervous habit – and shuffles his feet. “Prick was asking for it,” is all Teddy can get him to say.

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*Whereas ‘Shutter Island’ is set in 1954, this revolutionary piece of kit wasn’t actually developed in this particular form until 1957 by the respected Czech-Canadian ‘sexologist’ Kurt Freund – you can google it - (who is in no way intended to be affiliated to or represented by the – only coincidentally Czech - quack psychiatrist in the story). Variations on the general theme have however been in use (on humans) since the 1930s, and even earlier versions were used in lab studies for monitoring the effects of certain drugs on (the dicks of certain) dogs. (Vasodilators; don’t ask.) They were also at one time used – in some countries quite extensively - for exactly the insalubrious purpose outlined in the story.*
Here Noyce is in the governor’s mansion being interviewed by Dr Cawley once again.

Cawley likes to receive regular updates, so every couple of days he has George plucked out from the hospital’s general population and made to deliver a short report on the subject of Teddy. In addition, Noyce has had instructions from the outset that he must inform an orderly immediately, should his cell-mate begins exhibiting any unusual or untoward behaviour –

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘unusual, untoward,’” Noyce says.

Cawley tsks, wishing once again that when he and his colleagues been searching for their spy, they’d had the time and resources to seek out a better, more suitable candidate – a person fit to act as a proper companion for Laeddis; someone less ignorant and uncouth. “Untoward means – ‘inauspicious’ - ‘having the characteristics of disaster’ – or ‘difficult.’” Cawley replies, through gritted teeth.

Noyce frowns. “I know what it means,” he says. “It’s just when you say ‘untoward’ and you’re talking about Teddy –“

“I think you must mean ‘Laeddis’,” the doctor corrects. He’s wondered briefly if, when Noyce misnames his cellmate like this it could be part of some deliberate attempt on his part to obfuscate, but given the man’s lack of intellect and metal stability in general has concluded the prospect’s unlikely. After all he’s read Noyce’s file; knows the psychotropic preparations and experimental treatment regimes to which he was subjected when he was first brought to the hospital. This was not long after the war, when certain sections of the government’s interests were centred upon mind-control and brain-washing techniques, and a significant portion of Ashecliffe’s funding was still being diverted from military sources. Some of those old, crude methodologies – well, undoubtedly they’d be considered to be overly harsh by soft modern standards, and would certainly be enough to permanently unbalance a weakling like Noyce. In all honesty, much of what he experienced would more than likely be enough to addle even a far stronger, normal man’s wits.

Noyce is squirming nervously, shrugging his shoulders. As far as he’s concerned Laeddis and Teddy - it’s the same difference. “Mostly he’s thinking he’s Teddy Daniels at the moment.”

Cawley pinches the bridge of his nose between his forefinger and thumb, feeling the beginnings of a headache coming on. It’s an unprofessional reaction, he knows, but he finds that something about Noyce – be it his watery, frightened eyes or his strung-out, jittery bearing - invariably provokes such a deep antipathy in him that he can barely bring himself to speak civilly to the wretched little man. Noyce, with his tics and his foibles and neuroses is, among many other despicable things, a walking example of the dire consequences of degeneracy in the homosexual male, and Cawley wishes he’d had any other option than to have to inflict such a miserable specimen on the poor and unsuspecting Laeddis.

After this interview, he has Noyce make his reports to the staff nurse or, more often, straight into a Dictaphone in the staff nurse’s office.

Something in his most recent report, however, has earned George a face-to-face meeting with Cawley. It’s after hours – after midnight when he’s summoned, but Cawley has only just gotten around to reading the latest type-written transcript.
Noyce, asleep in his bunk is woken by a flashlight shining into his eyes and with an orderly’s hand clapped over his mouth to silence him. He’s lifted and carried out of bed before his sleep-addled wits can instruct him to struggle, and held down in the corridor outside, pressed to the floor while a second attendant fits a set of restraints on him.

This is all far too reminiscent for Noyce of his earlier sojourn in the hospital, when he was frequently kept in chains in his cell and was regularly shaken awake in the night, drugged and beaten and denied any sleep - but he’s learned since those days and this time, doesn’t make it easy for them; fights back, thrashing on the floor and trying to bite –

“Little bastard!” the startled orderly yelps, and when he yanks his hand away from his teeth, Noyce manages to get out a half-stifled howl of anguish -

Not that any of this does him any good because the other one’s already lifting him off his feet and into a head-lock, the bones of his forearm pinching off the air and blood supply round Noyce’s neck. As his vision greys out he knows full well that he’s done for, but keeps kicking backwards frantically, scrabbling with bare feet –

-till the next thing he knows is an icy shock of cold water, as a galvanized mop-bucketful is flung into his face. A swallow of it goes down the wrong way and for the next minute or so Noyce doesn’t care about anything except trying to keep breathing while painful coughs wrack him and he retches the rest of the water back up.

“– told us not to use sedation,” someone is insisting, somewhere high above his head. The orderly who’s speaking is standing over him because Noyce is currently slumped on his side on the gravel drive outside the governor’s mansion, propped up only slightly by the first marble step of the front porch.

“– be beside himself! - nowhere inside the house until you get rid of this ridiculous mess,” – that’s Dr Cawley speaking, and he sounds agitated –

Now Noyce is pulled upright and set on his feet, while the orderly whose hand he bit does his best – none too gently – to wring some of the water out of his sopping nightclothes. Then they go indoors. Someone’s thoughtfully laid a trail of newspaper for Noyce to walk on, to protect the parquet floor.

As he goes slipping and hobbling along he’s able to take in some details of the governor’s mansion that somehow escaped him during his previous visit. Noyce has never seen the inside of a gentlemen’s club, but imagines that the smoking room of a gentlemen’s club would be a lot like this; wood-panelled, quietly opulent, and redolent with the comforting smells of whiskey and newsprint, cigar smoke and polished leather. Soaking wet Noyce, wearing chains over pyjamas and in his bare feet, has seldom felt more conspicuous and in the wrong place. The trail of paper he’s following leads to Dr Cawley’s office – the same room Noyce saw him in before. Although he was definitely out on the front stoop belly-aching a minute ago, Cawley’s still had enough time to run ahead and get himself comfortably ensconced in the usual place behind his gigantic desk. From there he has the nerve to assume an air of mildly bemused nonchalance, as if he’s surprised to find Noyce waiting to see him at this time of night. As far as the overall effect he’s aiming for goes, it’s just a pity the doctor’s still slightly out of breath.

So, Noyce stands where he was sitting before, with bright lights dazzling his eyes and a strategically-placed thicker wad of newspaper under his feet. The restraints he’s got on don’t allow for much freedom of movement but in his sleep-addled, bemused state, Noyce’s body is not yet quite under control and his hands won’t stop trying to flutter up to his face. The sharp jerk on the chain makes
“I apologize for having had to send for you at such an ungodly hour,” the doctor says, and he really does seem affable enough - if you can manage to fail to take note of the way he keeps clenching and unclenching his jaw.

Noyce blinks tiredly back at him, pyjamas steadily dripping water onto the floor.

“It’s late, so I’ll be brief. Your report from last week states that Laeddis experienced a series of hallucinations, in which he thought he saw images of his dead wife.”

Noyce nods. That was in the report.

“And did he appear to interact with the hallucinations at all?”

He thinks about it. “Well, he looked like he might’ve been trying to – to put his arms around an’ hold her? Or dance with Dolores or something –“

“But as far as you could tell they didn’t speak?”

Noyce shakes his head.

“And did he begin talking to Dolores as he did last time, in his sleep?”

Another head-shake. “I think I put that in my report.”

“Afterwards did he mention anyone named ‘Rachel’? Saying that Rachel was missing, or perhaps he had been assigned to find her?”

Noyce is perplexed. This is a new one on him. He shifts his feet and fidgets a bit. “Rachel? Ah, doc, I’m not sure -”

“Think! It’s important! Believing he must implement a search for Rachel is, in many ways, the key to understanding Laeddis’ case -“

“But he’d been asleep –“

“As I suppose you were yourself,” the doctor says witheringly. “We must have more information than this to work with George, and while we can as you know listen in on you and Laeddis to some extent, our capabilities are very limited in that area, which is the main reason I had you put in place! We’re at a critical stage in Laeddis’ clinical progression, and you’ve let us down. This just isn’t good enough.”

“If that’s the way it is, I’m sorry for it, doc,” Noyce says. “But I can’t see how you expect me to stay awake all night, just to keep an eye on him. I gotta sleep!”

“I’ll give you something to help with that,” Cawley tells him.

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Afterwards they return him to his cell, a minor mercy for which Noyce is grateful. He’d expected to spend the remainder of the night trying to sleep on the floor in seclusion as punishment for trying to bite. When he gets back he finds Daniels awake and waiting for him.

“Where they take you, Georgie?” Teddy demands, looking him up and down before adding
uncertainly, “an’ – why are you all wet?”

Noyce shakes his aching head. Curls up on his side on his bed.

Teddy’s hovering. “George? They’re – they trying out some new kinda treatment on you?”

He has to swallow a couple of times to get past the pain in his throat. He’d – ha. He’d ‘politely refused’ the new drugs Cawley offered him back in his office. Noyce is only human; he’d been tired and put-upon and heartily sick of it, and when Cawley wouldn’t stop going on and on, speaking at him like he’s slow or stupid or Cawley’s little lap-dog – who’s been trained not just to do simple tricks but to rat out his friend on command - something in him just... snapped. If he’s finally growing a backbone he’s picked a bad time for it because back in the doctor’s office he did a foolish, very foolish thing and threw the pair of little orange pills Cawley’d given him right back at Cawley, aiming them straight for the good doctor’s face. Then the orderlies – well, they took care of that. Cawley pointedly stood up behind his desk, nodded to them and left, after which they proceeded to rough Noyce up a bit, hitting him and throttling him till they were able to shove the meds down his gullet and make him swallow them by force. It’s been so long since he was here before that Noyce had almost forgotten they’re allowed to do things like that. Funny how such a thing could’ve ever slipped his mind.

“Hydrotherapy,” he says to Daniels. “I been for some late night hydrotherapy, you think? Nah, they’re not trying to cure me. They want what they always want – just wanna hear what I got to say about you.”

Daniels stares at him for a moment, chewing his lip. “What can I say, Georgie,” he begins, “I’m –“

“It’s okay,” Noyce interrupts, shifting restlessly under the scrutiny of his friend’s earnest, concern-filled gaze. In their cramped quarters they have next to no real privacy and usually that’s all right because this time, he’s with Teddy and moreover George is used to living like that, has been locked up two or sometimes three to a cell for years, but right now he wants – doesn’t know what he wants, so he rolls onto his other side, turning to face the wall. “I’m real tired, Teddy,” he tells him. “Think m’gonna turn in now, if it’s all the same to you.”

“You sure you’re all right? You seem kinda – off.”

George feels kind of off. He’s dead tired but his heart’s started jack-hammering – blood feels like it’s fizzing through his veins – and there’s this weird tension in his muscles that makes him want to jump up and leap into a flat-out run. Takes him a big effort just to keep still.

“I’m fuh - fine,” Noyce lies, shuddering through his teeth.

“Teddy?” he says into the dark a while later. His friend’s gone back to bed, breathing slow and even now and Noyce is pretty sure he’s already asleep.

Noyce sighs, shifting so he can press some of the bruised part of his face up against the wall. The cold surface helps dull the ache, a little. Tonight came as a stark reminder of what he’s up against; that he’s a small man, insignificant and alone in what is at best an indifferent world, with a madman as his only ally and the agents of powerful, sometimes-hostile institution in complete control of his fate. It’s what Noyce has been facing since his return to the hospital, this unpalatable truth, and acknowledging it now takes the heart out of him, leaves him feeling just that bit more hopeless, helpless and unsafe.

“Sometimes,” Noyce says in a quiet voice, intended for no-one but himself, “it’s just that sometimes? I’m pretty sure I’m never gonna get outta this place.”
It starts off innocently enough, with them talking at night in their cell; just talking, that’s all. At this point neither man can find much use for sleep; Teddy’s dreams are horrendous and the drugs Noyce has started taking keep him awake.

There’s a library for patients at Ashecliffe – of sorts; old books, donated, and the content’s heavily censored of course. Nothing the governing board considers inflammatory, or with overly-stimulating content has much chance of making it onto the shelves (and if Teddy lands up reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* just one more time he thinks he’s going to have to make himself puke). Not that books are much help once the lights are turned off, which happens at eight pm sharp every evening. The orderlies seem to be under the impression that their patients, like canaries in a covered cage, fall asleep the instant the lights go out.

There’s an observation window set in the door, so it never really does gets properly dark, but the greenish glow from the fluorescent lamps that stay on all night in the corridor outside doesn’t provide enough light to read by and with a long, sleepless night stretching ahead, there’s little for them to do except talk. As Teddy discovered when they first met at Dedham, George can be an engaging companion and has a pleasant, wry sense of humour combined with a slightly off-kilter world-view that Teddy for one finds quietly charming.

But he’ll never say much about his antecedents: “I got born. Went to school; fought with my kid sister a lot. Grew up, got sent here. That’s about all there is I can tell you, Teddy. I had a quiet life.”

So mostly they talk about Teddy. About the past circumstances of Laeddis’ real life; his experiences in the army and abroad in Europe, and about his marriage to Dolores and their children and the details of their happy home life – and in spite the tragedy of how it ended he’s certain they were happy together, for a few of those years. Sometimes the fantasy of Teddy and his hush-hush, top secret work as a law enforcement officer becomes woven in - but actually the joins aren’t always easy to spot and the more time he spends with him, the more George is becoming convinced that as far as their basic character goes, Laeddis and Daniels aren’t really so very far apart.

They can talk on the good nights but when it gets bad for Teddy, when flashing lights white out his vision before the blinding headaches come, or he hallucinates and starts talking to phantoms, all George can do is speak softly, as he tries over and again to convince his friend that his dead wife Dolores is not really there. Sometimes he succeeds and then more often than not, Teddy, emotionally exhausted, drained by his experiences and not at all himself, will climb into Noyce’s lap and cling to him, like a child. George has even less idea what he should do at such times than he does when he fails to get through to his friend, a scenario that usually ends with Teddy raging back at him and taking Dolores’ side. They haven’t quite come to blows over it, not yet; though Teddy’s imaginary version of Dolores is very persuasive and when challenged, seems to come with a fine line in inflammatory back-chat. When it does happen Noyce is determined to go only as far as is necessary in the interests of his own self-defence; Teddy can’t be held responsible for his actions, after all.

Increasingly however, it’s been going badly for Noyce himself. Perhaps it’s the new medication they’re prescribing that’s making him believe such strange things; that the doctors have implanted wires in his back and sewn microphones behind his ears because they want to know about Laeddis and like to be able to use George as a conduit, whenever it takes their fancy to tune the dial and listen
in on him. George does get noticeably worse after he’s taken his medication of an evening; though
he has no way of knowing it they’ve started feeding him amphetamine, and quite possibly the same
thing would happen to anyone after they’d gone for five nights in a row with not one wink of sleep.

Noyce scratches his shoulders, flanks, and the back of his neck raw in the attempt to get the things he
thinks the doctors must have put in him, out, before Teddy manages to persuade him to stay still
enough for long enough to let Teddy examine him. He makes him remove his shirt and then eases off
his undershirt, which is blood-stained and flecked with fragments of torn skin and sticks to him, and
props Noyce face-forwards against the wall.

“You dumb bastard,” he mutters, as he tries to tend the cross-hatch of shallow, seeping wounds
scored all over his friend’s back. It’s a losing battle; it’s after lights out so they’re locked in for the
night and Teddy has nothing to clean the oozing mess with. He can’t even have Noyce put his shirt
back on or it will stick. “You go on like this, they’re gonna put you in a padded cell, you hear me?”

“M’allright, Teddy,” Noyce mumbles over his shoulder.

“Oh yeah?” Teddy fumes, pulling him round to face him. It’s not warm in their room but the sweat’s
beading on Noyce’s forehead and at the same time his skin is goose-fleshed and he can’t stop
shivering. Teddy sees how wide his pupils are dilated; they’re blown, and of wildly different sizes.

“That new shit they’ve got you on’s not helping,” he tells him. “Starting now, you’re not taking any
more of it, okay?”

“Morning an’ evening, Teddy,” Noyce replies faintly. “Gettin’ those tablets twice a day. How’d’you
figure m’gonna manage that?”

“You leave that to me,” Teddy says, pulling shirtless, shivering Noyce into a stiff embrace to try and
warm him some, because his forehead might be burning up but his teeth are chattering and the rest of
him feels freezing cold and clammy. They sit down on Teddy’s bunk together. It’s plain that George
is painfully embarrassed; he makes an anxious noise and ducks down, trying to hide, so Teddy tucks
his head in against his chin and leans on him, sighing.

“You just gotta – gotta try an’ get a hold’a yourself, Georgie. Just - calm the fuck down! I’ll look out
for you. Gonna be right here to help you, okay?” He claps George briskly on the shoulder; leaves
his hand where it is for a little too long while he thinks about it, then pats him there once or twice,
hesitantly gentling him a bit to see if that’ll help settle him down.

It isn’t an unqualified success, the skin on Noyce’s back currently being not in the best shape. But
there’s an less-damaged area running the length of his spine and after Teddy spends a minute or two
working his fingers up and down that, soothing out a few of the knots of tension Noyce sags against
him and lets his breath out in a long, weary sigh.

Teddy experiences an odd rush of mostly unidentifiable emotion on hearing it. He’s unaccountably
pleased with himself but at the same time acutely aware that yet another boundary between them has
been crossed and for that reason, is more than a little disturbed. The background level of
embarrassment he's feeling – on both of their accounts - is a far simpler reaction to process and
quickly latching onto that, he clears his throat.

“So! You feelin’ relaxed as yet?” he demands loudly. It’s already an awkward enough situation, so
he tries to pose his question in a tone that’s comically brusque.

Noyce nods his head and huffs in amusement, out through his nose. “Sure, Teddy,” he says, voice
muffled against Daniels’ chest. “Why not?”

“Yeah, all right then,” Teddy says briskly and flops onto his side, using his weight and the hold he’s got around Noyce to drag him down beside him. He shifts Noyce so his back’s to Teddy’s chest and pulls his skinny rump into his lap, shoving his knees to fit in behind the bend of his legs. Snagging hold of his blanket he drapes it over him and George both.

“Warm enough?” shouts Daniels, as he tucks the cover in round Noyce’s shoulders.

There’s no response.

“You sleepin’ already?” he all-but hollers then, to let Noyce, who’s stopped moving and is holding himself absolutely rigid, know that this is kind of weird for him, too, but seeing as his friend’s gone - well, even more nuts, for now Teddy can’t afford to take his eye off him. Can’t very well keep watch on him all night, so he’ll just have to try keeping him close.

No, Noyce isn’t sleeping; shakes his head slightly by way of reply and Teddy finishes with –

“So, you better try and get some shut-eye, then, hadn’t you!” delivered at almost at the top of his voice - which earns them a cautionary rap on the door from the night-shift orderly, plus some much-deserved hammering against the wall from the inmate in the adjoining cell.

There’s a long pause during which Noyce shifts uncomfortably and Teddy tenses his muscles in case he has to grapple with him, in case the crazy drug-addled fuck takes it into his head he’s going to do something ill-advised – such as fling himself bodily out of the bed.

“Oh Kay Teddy,” George says at last. And then - “you – you figuring on maybe getting some shut-eye too?”

“Guess I could do that,” Teddy tells him stiffly, “yeah. I guess I could.” Sure, he’s cried on Noyce’s shoulder a couple of times, but refuses to feel ashamed of that because they’re in this together and besides, George is his friend. It’s not the quite same this time though; not quite so easy to overlook or excuse because this time Teddy is in a calm and well-balanced emotional state.

He hasn’t been in such close proximity to anyone in years and hasn’t wanted it; not since Dolores, it hasn’t seemed right. But bunking up with Noyce this way – well. Noyce isn’t a woman and they’re most definitely not lovers, points that go some way to making a difference so perhaps it’s more like they’re... comrades, facing difficult or uncertain conditions together. Yes, comrades, and if you think about it that’s more or less the truth, because ‘incarcerated indefinitely in a mental hospital’ should make the grade for ‘difficult’ and ‘uncertain’ in anyone’s book.

However. This already feels much too intimate. The awkwardness and embarrassment are fading: holding George in his arms Teddy doesn’t want to let go because the simple human contact is bringing him warmth, solace and, incongruously, an overriding sense of safety; straightforward feelings of uncomplicated pleasure, all of which have been absent from Teddy’s life’s for a long, long time.

The same can’t be said for Noyce, who’s never shared a lover’s, or even a comradely embrace because aside from sick deviants and perverts (and he’s had his fair share of offers from men like that, in prison) honestly, who would ever want to touch him? He still can’t sleep so he stays awake long into the night, worrying and puzzling it over in the dark, eventually convincing himself that Teddy – or even Andrew, if that makes a difference, because he’s beginning to idolize whichever one or other of them makes the man – is clearly so good and selfless that he’s even willing to overlook some of Noyce’s more obvious deficiencies, purely in the interests of helping him.
It doesn’t stop his bad dreams but now when Teddy startles awake and finds Noyce beside him then it’s not so difficult to go back to sleep.

This is one thing they don’t talk about. Teddy always instigates it, pulling George into his bed or clambering in beside him. But they sleep together most nights after that.

And after the first night Noyce does sleep; doesn’t have to swallow any more of the stimulant-laden tablets because Teddy’s as good as his word and he does manage to take care of that.

Next day they’re standing in line waiting for their morning doses of medication. The face of clinical psychiatry – a subject upon which Dr Cawley, when the mood takes him, is wont to expound at very great length to Teddy – is changing; it’s being revolutionized by the development of entirely new classes of antipsychotic drugs that are set to replace the more draconian patient management techniques of confinement, surgery and shock therapy.

At present however, medication is still synonymous with sedation for most of them, the case of George Noyce being a peculiar and particular exception.

“Refuse to take ‘em,” Teddy tells George, sotto voce, just before it’s Noyce’s turn in the queue. “Make a fuss.”

Well, that’s easy enough.

They get to the point when the nurse is insisting that she “has to see you swallow the pills, Mr Noyce,” and George is refusing to back down. The orderly’s on his way over to see what the commotion’s about when Daniels steps in smoothly between them.

He takes the tablets in one hand and grabs a hold of Noyce’s shirt-front in the other, twisting the fabric round his fist and, cheered on by the other patients, uses it to shove the smaller man, shaking the astonished Noyce vigorously back and forth. “Open your trap-hole, buddy-boy,” he snarls, right into George’s face. “I mean it - open up! We got no time to listen to any of your crap today!”

Noyce gapes back at him, stunned, and hurt. He knows he can’t always express himself, or make eye-contact, or remember how to comport himself in the manner of a normal person, but more than twenty years spent in prison and shut up in a mental hospital will do that to a man and until now Teddy’s made allowances, never letting on that he’s noticed anything wrong and always carefully treating him as an equal and with patience and respect; not the easiest feat to accomplish the many times George has been a stammering, squirming mess. Teddy’s esteem is precious to Noyce and the thought of being deprived of it makes him start to panic; what can he do now that he’s turning on him, because Teddy’s the only person he –

Actually, come to think of it, he’s looking Noyce steadily in the eye with a calm, level gaze, and isn’t angry or raging at all.

George catches on.

“Don’t bother,” Daniels says over his shoulder to the approaching orderly, “Gotta live with this, day in, day out. Haveta know how to handle him when he gets like this.”

And this is the thing about Teddy Daniels: imaginary assumed persona he might be, but you can’t deny that when he’s properly in the groove he’s got some real authoritative clout behind him that comes from truly believing in all this secret government agent horse-shit.

Daniels isn’t asking; he’s telling them the way it’s going to be, and because when he speaks like this there’s no doubt in his mind that he’ll be obeyed, sometimes even the orderlies find themselves
falling for it. This one does, anyway.

Teddy palms the tablets and George pretends to take them.

“F’you like, next time you could try leaving him to me, ma’am,” Teddy suggests to the nurse afterwards. Lingering there by the dispensary desk he cuts a pretty absurd figure of a gallant: Teddy the convicted murderer, dishevelled and deranged, but in spite of that enough of Daniels’ natural charm still remains that matching him for absurdity, the staid and matronly staff-nurse actually blushes and flutters a bit - and then graciously accepts his proposition.

So, morning and evening they pull the same routine; Teddy flirting gently with the duty nurses as he pockets the pills while George tries to look cowed and subordinate throughout. No-one ever thinks to question Daniels’ motives or integrity in this matter. It really is as easy as that.
Teddy and George

Just under two weeks into their new arrangement and the situation starts to get complicated.

Noyce is aware of the danger; has been living in dread of it, actually. He’s reasoned with himself that it’s all entirely platonic and keeps this in mind as he strives to take no enjoyment whatever from sleeping with Teddy. But being in such close contact – with anyone - is new to him and the fact that it’s Teddy is overwhelming, so he might try to distance himself but is not always successful; for some mystifying reason at night his friend just, plain, likes being near to him. That much is obvious even to Noyce, and even he can allow that he’s flattered by the notion.

Sometimes his old, sordid inclinations and bodily urges attempt to reinstate but Noyce has had a lifetime of practice at denying them and scrupulously keeps himself in check.

It’s not that he never masturbates, but on the rare occasions when he can’t help but succumb, he’s always so backed-up with the tension that’s accumulated over the weeks or even months it’s been since the last time that he’s quick to finish, which is fortunate, because for Noyce this is very much of a last resort. He hates the whole process; hates having to handle himself and consciously or unconsciously, is in the habit of inflicting subtle forms of punishment before, during, and after.

This time however, is different. Firstly, it’s odd because he’s not drenched in the freezing spray of a cold shower or hunched in a communal bathroom stall doing his best to bring himself off down a filthy prison toilet. Instead, Noyce is lying on his side. It’s warm and he’s comfortable and very contented and....this isn’t right at all. He never feels this good when he’s doing this, and moreover knows he’s not in the habit of relieving himself in his bed.

Still mostly asleep he pushes his hips forwards slightly, which brings a frisson of delightful sensation. He realizes that he doesn’t seem to be manipulating himself with his hands - and that’s a welcome relief because even in the middle of masturbating, Noyce can’t quite prevent himself from worrying about the aftermath. If he doesn’t have to actually touch himself – there, there’s a chance that this time maybe he’ll be able to escape the desperate, unclean feeling that makes him want to scrub his hands raw when he finishes. And he isn’t clawing at the disgustingly turgid flesh with his fingernails or tugging so hard that it hurts; the pressure is gentle, entirely pleasurable for once, and much more diffuse.

Neither is it centred solely on his groin. The warm, yielding surface he’s slowly rubbing against is larger than he first thought and occasionally seems to heave or shift slightly, though it doesn’t pull away or attempt to push back.

It’s slowly occurring to sleep-confused, disoriented Noyce – and this may be the oddest thing of all – that perhaps this time, he isn’t alone.

These days, waking in the night to find George pressed close to him isn’t all that much of an unusual experience for Teddy and usually, he welcomes it. At this point Noyce is however pressing very close indeed, with the notch of his body clasped tight to Daniels’ thigh and the heat and hardness of what is unmistakeably Noyce’s erection jutting into it. His friend’s eyes are closed and as he lets out a soft, breathless groan, a thrill or a chill of some unidentifiable emotion jolts its way down Teddy’s back. For a moment his mind goes completely blank.
The other man’s clearly asleep or very close to it and Teddy tries to remind himself that this is no more than a natural reaction to friction, to finding the warmth of a friendly body nearby. It isn’t even as if he hasn’t been similarly afflicted, from time to time. He’s woken hard and aroused up against the small of George’s back on more than one occasion, and has just been lucky so far - luckier than the hapless Noyce at any rate - not to have been caught out in that state. And sure, it’s embarrassing; but what’s a little leg-humping between friends, and the sensation in itself though odd, isn’t especially unpleasant. Teddy clutches at the vain hope that maybe they’ll even be able to laugh about this, later.

“George?” Teddy says carefully.

Noyce’s eyes flutter open and for a second they’re heavy with sleep and completely relaxed, allowing Teddy to witness the exact, devastating, moment when his friend realizes where he is and what he’s doing. An immediate reaction sets in; an over-reaction on all counts, really: looking horrified, George flails backwards and backwards until he falls out of the bed, sprawling on his back on the floor. Jumping up to his feet, he puts his hand between his legs and suddenly wrenches down on himself, as if he’s trying to yank off the composite parts of his male anatomy all together at once and by force.

“George!” Daniels cries, scrambling after him, aghast. “Whaddaya doing? You’ll hurt yourself – stop that! Don’t!”

Shaking his head helplessly, hands still kneading and pulling painfully at his groin, Noyce staggers blindly away from Teddy till his legs hit the edge of his own bunk which he drops down upon, shoulders heaving with dry, shuddering sobs. He tries to speak but only a high-pitched whine comes out; a terrible, agonized sound that he’s obviously appalled to be making and yet can’t seem to bring under control. He has to cram both hands over his mouth to stifle it.

Noyce scrambles up to crouch on top of his bunk. Weeping, he hugs his knees to his chest and hides his face by jamming it into the corner where the end of his bed-stead is pushed up against the wall.

Daniels stares at him, completely at a loss. For a grown man, a man of Noyce’s age, to be this terrified by his own hard-on; well it’s beyond pitiful isn’t it?

Teddy feels a warm rush of fondness and compassion for his fucked-up friend and in that moment wants nothing more than to console him. He crosses over to Noyce’s side of the room and sits down on his bed. “It’s okay, Georgie,” he tells him, putting his hand on Noyce’s shoulder. Far from reassuring him however, this makes Noyce cringe and draw even tighter in on himself.

“We’re friends, aren’t we, George?” Teddy perseveres, forcibly extracting Noyce from his corner and pulling him to his side, where Noyce immediately hides his face again, burying it against Teddy’s chest.

“Only friend I got in this goddamn place,” Teddy whispers to him, “and it’s all right, Georgie-boy. That’s not gonna change, I swear. I’m not goin’ anywhere.” Damn if Teddy isn’t getting a little bit choked-up too and there’s a catch in his voice when he says - “you know I can’t very well do without you.”

Noyce is a wreck. He plainly wants to hide away from Teddy but it’s only a small room and there’s also a part of him that wants – seems to desperately want - to seek solace from him, too.

“It’s not okay!” he sobs, “how I am - you shouldn’t even haveta look at me, Teddy, don’t –“ and then he’s babbling about how unnatural it is, and he’s sorry, so sorry; he doesn’t want to have to be so disgusting and vile -
“And you’re not, George, you’re not,” Teddy hushes him, “I don’t see you that way at all. It doesn’t matter, George, you’re okay,” he insists, “I got this.” He finds himself carefully kissing the top of Noyce’s head - and Teddy doesn’t do that, doesn’t kiss men; when his own father was alive never gave the old man so much as a quick peck on the cheek let alone a warm, companionable kiss; and yet the strange thing about it is that with Noyce, it doesn’t seem like a strange thing to do at all.

Teddy’s got his arm around his shoulders and Noyce’s blotchy, tear-stained face is still pressed flush with his chest. At the same time George has put his knees up to hide himself and is trying to keep the lower portion of body twisted as far away from Teddy as possible - which isn’t very, given the size of the bed they’re sitting on; so although it’s painfully obvious that he’s still being troubled by his erection – and that’s downright amazing, given the rough treatment it’s been on the receiving end of lately, he still seems at a loss or unable to properly deal with it. Teddy wonders if -

“Don’t worry George,” he hears himself tell Noyce, “I’m gonna take care of you.” He hadn’t planned on saying that but is surprised to find he feels no urge to reconsider; experiences only a weird and - given the circumstances - completely misplaced sense of anticipation perhaps, but that’s all.

Teddy scooshes closer to him, till Noyce is pressed literally, up against the wall. “Let me take care of you, Georgie,” he says, taking a chance and brushing his hand gently over the ridiculous tented-up spot in his friend’s pants. Noyce recoils violently again but at least this time doesn’t pull away quite so much – although that’s more than likely because there’s no space for it. Teddy says - “I told you I’ve got you, right?”

Noyce nods ever so slightly; squirms and whines as Teddy puts his hand out and tries that again. A thought occurs to him -

“George? Haven’t you had anyone ever -?”

Making a strangled noise, George vigorously shakes his head.

Teddy groans, inwardly. He’s not getting turned on by this; he’s not. But it is sort of reminiscent of the first time with his high-school sweetheart – Betty, her name was, only seventeen and she was already a knock-out. It was the first time for her, too, and they’d both been so, so nervous.

If he’d ever thought about it Teddy would be of the opinion he’s one hundred percent red-blooded male, so it goes without saying he’s never had his hand on another man’s genitals before. But as he slips his hand through the waistband of George’s pyjamas and takes hold of him he’s curious, more than anything and once he’s touching him it feels – perhaps because they share the same basic equipment, or because they’ve been spending so much time together in such close proximity, or perhaps even for some other reason - it feels kind of familiar. Reassuring even, if in an undeniably weird way. Under cover of Noyce’s pyjamas Teddy explores, tentatively with the flat of his hand and with his fingertips, tracing the trail of coarse hairs, working from Noyce’s navel down to his groin.

His erection is not something it would be easy to ignore yet George jumps with fright when Teddy wraps his hand around him, shies back wide-eyed, looking terrified. Teddy steadies him with a hand on his shoulder and leans his forehead against Noyce’s to calm him, before he tries shifting his grip. George can’t keep himself still; keeps jumping and twitching as Teddy tries to find out what sort of things he should be doing down there but it’s soon clear that in this area, the other man really hasn’t much of a clue.

Noyce’s cock is firm and feels pleasantly smooth – even if it’s over-heated and a bit clammy with sweat, and after a moment of total confusion, Teddy is equal-parts intrigued and delighted to discover
that – unlike Teddy, who had his cut and painfully stitched by a military surgeon three days into his first week in the armed forces - George is still possessed of his foreskin. Sliding it back and forth in combination with a strategic spot of squeezing gets even more of reaction out of him than anything before – if the death-grip hold Noyce has just taken on Daniels’ wrist is anything to go by.

Teddy tries to concentrate on memories of his old girlfriend Betty, how hard he’d gotten when he realized that this time, they were actually going to do this. She’d come on his hand, first, right onto his fingers, something that till it happened, didn’t occur to him would even be possible -

(-something like Noyce is about to do. Teddy’s on the brink of making – oh, god – Noyce come, too, and that’s just from Teddy using his hand -)

- and if he’s honest, perhaps Teddy is getting a little something for himself out of this, even if it’s just a pleasant fantasy. If he’s lost in the memory of Betty’s plump, full lips and soft hair, her sweet cries and how prettily she moaned, where’s the harm in it? If it’s helping Teddy to help out his friend, which it must be or else why would he be reacting like this? Because Noyce, with his thinning hair and homely, unshaven face is anything but pretty. He’s un-pretty to an almost reassuring degree, in fact.

But when George gasps and turns his tear-streaked, red-blotched face to Teddy’s, fixing him with a desperate, anxious look, their gazes lock and in that moment Teddy feels a flood of warmth in his groin that has nothing to do with old memories, just as the spike of pleasure that skewers him – not really an orgasm, but something sharp and intense and close – as his friend collapses against his shoulder, shaking with the intensity of his climax, has nothing whatever to do with his recollection of Betty’s tight, wet little pussy.

No. No. That’s all definitely Noyce.

The aftermath is – again, complicated.

Teddy’s been knocked sideways and perhaps that makes him a little slow to begin with. So of course Noyce - nervous energy not noticeably diminished even after his orgasm - in turn thinks, initially, that Teddy must be feeling both violated and revolted, which couldn’t be further from the truth. In fact Teddy’s berating himself for not having tried to French-kiss his friend at some point in their interaction, a notion that shocks him deeply though he can’t deny that now, it’s something he very much wishes to do. Also he’s focussing obsessively for some reason on the image of Noyce – raw, wide-open, laid bare - as he’d looked in the instant before he ejaculated. In Teddy’s opinion he’d looked amazing, and how could he have never noticed before that George’s eyes are such an incredible shade of blue?

So there are early misunderstandings, true, but once the cleanup operation’s underway they’ve reached an uneasy peace, of sorts.

Patients at Ashecliffe aren’t allotted handkerchiefs due to the ligature-potential of thin handkerchief material should it be torn into narrow strips and knotted (which has never made much sense to Teddy because don’t they all of them already own at least two pairs of shoelaces?) so in the end he mops up his friend’s issue using one of his own socks. It’s comical and awkward and helps to break the ice a bit.

They’ve been sharing a bed almost every night for approximately two weeks and yet Noyce clearly isn’t sure if he’ll be allowed to sleep with Teddy after, and his uncertainty leaves Teddy feeling sad for him, and vaguely depressed. So he simply pulls George into his bed and welcomes him with an arm holding tight round his chest and one leg flung over his hip, clutching onto him like he’s an enormous, living ragdoll. By now it’s a familiar position for both of them, and both are soon sound
asleep.

They wake up together as usual. Noyce hasn’t much to say for himself the next morning and seems a little in awe; darts out of the cell as soon as the guard comes to unlock it and doesn’t come back.

He’s gone for a while and when it looks like he’s gone on to breakfast without him, Teddy takes a moment to think over the events of the previous evening and take stock. What’s happened makes him wonder, to question certain things regarding his own self that he’d always assumed were straight and obvious fact.

Teddy turns onto his side on his bunk and faces the wall. It’s much too embarrassing for him to consider any of the real-life men he knows in that way and so instead he runs through a list of movie stars in his head. Thinks about outdoorsy, manly men like Jimmy Stewart, Billy Holden and Rock Hudson and even throws in a couple of crooners for contrast - Sinatra and Bing and – nothing. Nada. The image of Bogie might stir a twinge of reaction; after all he and Noyce share a vaguely similar stringy, underfed sort of hang-dog look but it’s negligible; fleeting, at best. He puts his hand on his cock and thinks about the smooth skin, and soft breasts and round asses of women in general and then about his dear Dolores and – yes! That’s much better.

Best of all however is the recollection of how Noyce had reacted when Teddy first wrapped his hand round his dick, his disbelief and panic - and Teddy hadn’t quite believed it but it’s looking like what he said about never having been with anybody before might almost be true. Teddy thinks about Noyce shivering at his side as he touched him, how he’d let Teddy –oh god! With his eyes shut and his face burrowing into Teddy’s shoulder; how much he’d trusted him, and how Noyce’s whole body had shaken with the effort of him trying to come as quietly as possible –

The thought of that’s enough to finish Teddy too and he lets out a choking gasp as his release floods out over his fingers. Last night was a pretty intense experience, but - fuck!   He’s just jerked off to thoughts of, and had a pretty intense orgasm while thinking about jerking off Noyce! George Noyce!

This is completely and in every way fucked-up. Teddy finds himself wondering – just for an instant then - what other sorts of things he could do to Noyce, wonders what else Noyce might allow him to do, too. Surprised at himself, he wipes his hand on his blankets and does his best to vigorously suppress all thoughts of anything like that.

Just as well perhaps, because at this point Noyce come sidling – positively sidling - back into their cell. Teddy leaps out of bed at once and makes a grab for him; seizes, propels him backwards, and is pinning him by the shoulders up against the wall behind the door -

While George’s face contorts with open panic. It doesn’t occur to Teddy until some time afterwards that George fully expects he’s about to be given what he obviously considers to be a well-deserved beating. “I’m s – sorry!” he gulps. “Teddy – you don’t needta! Last night I didn’t mean to – ah!”

Teddy’s knee wedges in between Noyce’s legs as Teddy partially lifts his friend up and bends him back. George is gripping hold of his hands, blunt fingernails digging into Daniels’ wrists, but otherwise he makes little effort to defend himself. Teddy shoves him firmly against the wall again and George’s jaw clenches and his eyes squeeze shut as he prepares to accept his punishment. His head falls back, exposing the curve of his throat.

Teddy finds Noyce’s Adam’s apple and he sucks roughly, mouthing and running his teeth over it.

“Argh!” Noyce’s body jerks and he grunts in surprise. His mouth sags open and then Teddy’s
kissing that, too, nipping George’s lips and shoving in roughly, cramming with his tongue as deep as he can - doing his best to stuff his mouth full. That makes Noyce start struggling in earnest, whining and making small, strangled, panicky noises all around him.

This is much more like what Teddy had in mind. Still pinning his friend in place by the shoulders and with a knee in his groin, he runs his hands up and under Noyce’s shirt, pulling it free from his slacks – why’s he always so goddamn buttoned-down? – the better to access his lean flanks and the hard muscles of his stomach.

Noyce twists his face sideways, breaking free. “Stop, Teddy!” he gasps, “we can’t!”

He’s surprised by the fierce sound of disappointment that wrenches free from his throat, but Teddy complies, reluctantly drawing back and setting his friend down.

Panting for breath, Noyce cringes from him and hugs himself tightly, trying to flatten his body side-on against the wall. His head hangs miserably, ashamed.

“Ah, Georgie,” Teddy tells him, “don’t.” He cups George’s face and makes him look at him; moves closer to kiss him again but, warned by the look of naked alarm in Noyce’s eyes at his approach goes about it much more carefully this time, allowing Noyce to get used to the idea, first.

And a bit of considerate treatment works: Teddy bumps noses with him, ghosts breath softly over Noyce’s face and nuzzles away at his mouth with gentle lips, not forcing anything on him, not forcing the pace at all, and this time is elated when Noyce, resting his hands lightly on Teddy’s chest, at long last, finally, begins kissing him back.

It’s chaste and it’s innocent, as kisses go – just an absurdly tentative press of Noyce’s dry lips back against his and a gasp when he catches his breath – but the sensation’s so sweet that he even keeps feeling elated when George pulls away again much too soon, and when he says, very quietly – “tonight?” it just makes Teddy want to embrace him again.

“You promise?” he hears himself blurt.

Noyce can’t manage to meet his gaze. “Okay Teddy,” he says softly. “If you like.”
Working on the assumption that he’s now successfully secured his cell-mate's trust and confidence, the rules for constant contact between Noyce and Laeddis have been relaxed. This means that outside of mealtimes and the occasional shared therapy group, often they don’t see much of each other during the day. Patients at Ashecliffe deemed capable are expected to contribute domestic duties to the running of the hospital; at this point Teddy’s roster has him working afternoons in the kitchens while George is in the prison laundry, over on the opposite end of the facility.

This doesn’t stop Teddy straining away all day for the merest glimpse of him. The image of George is a constant for him that morning, forever on Teddy’s mind. He can’t fathom what strange manner of affliction is overtaking him and finds that he doesn’t much care; all Teddy knows is that when he sees George entering the cafeteria at lunchtime the relief he feels is genuinely like a weight, lifting up from his chest, and for the few minutes they spend eating side by side it helps just to be able to sit close to him – and Teddy sits very close indeed, spending the meal surreptitiously pressing his thigh up against his friend’s leg. He watches George’s hands shaking a bit and his face flushing pink as he tries to make himself not pull away and through the impetuous, headstrong rush of whatever’s come over him Teddy sits there smitten, thinking it’s about the most adorable reaction he’s ever seen.

He hasn’t been as subtle as he thinks. When Eddie from therapy group pushes past with his tray he tosses them a snide: “nice to see you guys joined together at the hip,” but neither man bothers to reply; George is too embarrassed and Teddy already occupied in simply drinking in the sight of Noyce.

It’s a wrench to be parted when they finish their lunch since Teddy knows there are hours to go before he’ll see George again. Fortune, however, favours him somewhere in mid-afternoon. During preparations for the evening meal one of the outsized catering canisters gets tipped over by accident and the head chef deluged in a slick of thick liquid brown gravy, which soaks right through his outer white uniform and then down to the clothes he’s wearing underneath. Chef throws a predictable hissy-fit; Teddy, who happens to be the nearest general dogsbody standing close by is dispatched to fetch the spare set and on finding that Chef’s locker is bare, is sent to borrow alternatives.

Off to the laundry Teddy goes, a spring in his step and a song in his heart.

He surprises Noyce in the ironing room where he’s working alone, feeding bed sheets through an electric clothes-press. George’s look of pleasure and shy welcome warm him; he’d intended only to say a quick hello but now – damnit. Teddy’s not sure what he’d originally intended.

The door’s open but there’s no-one about. It’s easy enough for him to corral George up into the corner in the shadow of a stack of shelves; he’s backing edgily away from Teddy’s approach, after all.

On the one hand George is small and pasty-looking; he’s a poorly-favoured, middle-aged man. Teddy can see it, he can; just as he knows that the two of them – a pair of sad degenerates grappling together in the dingy confines of a lunatics’ prison laundry – must by any normal standards make for a woeful and deeply embarrassing sight.

On the other hand, none of this matters when he’s kissing Noyce, and Noyce is kissing him back and
making soft, breathy noises of abandon in his throat. He has thin lips and stubble and a slippery, pointed tongue and it surely it should be indecent, to have to listen to another man trying to stifle his moans of pleasure like that. None of it should be arousing and yet every aspect of it is; from George’s hands on his shoulders – and right now he is gripping tight hold of Teddy, pressing the length of his body against him as if for support, as if he’s having trouble staying upright – to his tongue flicking into Teddy’s mouth, and the hollowing of his cheeks as Noyce sucks deeply back on his – it is. It’s - all of it. Teddy finds all of it completely, ridiculously erotic.

Maybe Teddy’s just sex-starved. Probably would be easy to write this off as one of the more obvious symptoms.

It’s not like he’s in love with Noyce, or anything.

They finish with Teddy’s hand down his friend’s underpants once again. After Teddy’s made him come George seems positively – aghast; afterwards he’s a sorry sight, trembling with distress, and this leaves Teddy with mixed feelings because – *fuck!* – poor Noyce and all, but how much has he been wanting to do that?

Traumatized or not, this time George does make a tentative effort to return Teddy’s attentions. He’s uncomfortably hard; has been since before they started kissing, and having just had Noyce cling to him, twisting both arms round his neck, bucking into him at last in a series of tentative, half-apologetic little thrusts while Teddy persuades – or more accurately coerces him, with whispers, threats and filthy, filthy promises, to *keep fucking his hand* –

Well. That didn’t do anything to help alleviate his aroused state. Nevertheless, he forces himself to politely decline. It doesn’t take a degree in advanced psychology to see that Noyce is facing some pretty severe problems in this area, and the thought of pushing his limits any further, past the point when he might actually break, has no appeal at all.

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While Teddy’s advances aren’t unwanted, George can’t exactly say he welcomes them. He’s been taught to be deeply dismayed by, and has wrestled with what he considers to be certain problematic aspects of his sexuality for most of his adult life and even the surprising turn that recent events have taken with Teddy aren’t likely to make those rigidly-enforced beliefs and long-held prejudices disappear overnight.

Teddy being Teddy, however, has a better chance at getting through to him than most because George would gladly break any rule he knows of on his friend’s behalf.

George never spares himself. His habit of self-condemnation is firmly entrenched and for some time he’s been struggling against whatever abnormal part of his makeup it is that makes him yearn for something more from Teddy, to be something in addition to his friend. It’s easy – it's dead easy - for Noyce to loathe himself for his impulses, that’s been more or less second nature to him for years, by now. What’s absolutely impossible is for George to revile Teddy, a person he holds in the highest regard, for the same. In spite of his best efforts, his feelings for Daniels aren’t entirely pure. He would never rationalize it to himself in quite so straightforward a manner - his youthful experience of corrective therapy have made such a long-lasting impression that Noyce as an adult is barely capable of thinking rationally, when it comes to the subject of sex and his own inclinations relating to it - but if a good man like Teddy really is sharing some of Noyce’s ....baser impulses, as he certainly appears to be – then isn’t it possible that those impulses might not be quite so abhorrent or completely vile?

After Teddy’s gone and Noyce is on his own in the laundry again it occurs to him, as it has done
before, that his association with Daniels has somehow led to him corrupting him. It’s an upsetting thought - but one that even the paranoid Noyce isn’t able to entertain for long. A long life of abstinence and denial has led George to hope for and as to expect as his due - exactly nothing.

Teddy’s friendship alone is more than Noyce believes he deserves, and he would have been happy to carry on with things as they were between them and strictly platonic. His friend however clearly has other ideas and as far as their physical relationship goes it’s Teddy – crazy, deluded Teddy, effortlessly demolishing all of George’s carefully-built defences with his warmth and kind enthusiasm – who’s doing every bit of running.

Noyce has zero experience dealing with nice men in this area – or more accurately, after all these years incarcerated has next to no experience dealing with nice anything in any area - but as far as he can tell Teddy does seem to want him; truly, if inexplicably, seems to want to lay hands on him and touch him; kiss him, and, and –

His knees go a bit weak at the thought of Teddy and especially the...kissing, which is a new experience, and feels wonderful to Noyce - and he finds he has to sit down quite suddenly on the floor, feeling light-headed due to a unsettling combination of deep-seated guilt, distress, worry - exhilaration. Once he's there he hugs his knees to his chest and rocks his body back and forwards for a minute. The last time he was a patient at Ashecliff, between the drug trials and vicious experiments, during those long, twilight stretches spent alone in his cell when he was sick and confused or afraid and in pain, more often than not he could soothe himself if he spent a while moving like this, but – those days were long ago, and this time even the familiar, repetitive movements don’t do much to calm his perturbed state. Noyce supposes he should have guessed that would be the case. Seems he’s on his own in uncharted territory, now.
Teddy’s on a pretty steep learning curve; is discovering a few things he hadn’t known about himself. That he appears to also be attracted to men – or at least, one particular one of them – is now a given. And of course he enjoys sex - likes to rub and strain away and to be touched and come off as much as the next man but, being with Noyce, he’s realizing that a significant proportion of the satisfaction he gets from engaging in - well, sex, is tied up with a strong urge he has to see the results of his efforts; in experiencing the effects of his sensual successes –

To put it bluntly, Teddy just likes being able to see how much he’s managed to please the other person. Actually, this has always been true. He just hasn’t thought about it in quite these terms before.

So, he’s got Noyce down on his back on the floor. Teddy’s not much of a romantic, but even he can see that the setting isn’t great.

There’s an early evening, then a late-night patrol of the wards and unless the patients are particularly noisy, outside of these predictable times the staff on night-duty rarely look in on them. It’s not impossible, however, that a very bored orderly could decide to implement an additional round of checks just for something to do. The place where Teddy and Noyce are most hidden from view is on the floor in the corner of the cell, tight up against the wall that has the door with the observation window set in it.

Teddy would like for them to be in a comfortable bed, at least, but their beds are where hospital regulations state they should be and they can’t afford to be caught moving furniture about at this time of night. Or if not in bed, perhaps – Daniels struggles a bit for alternatives. The sites for his previous sexual encounters have been, predictably, bed – overwhelmingly and also his main preference; the back seat of a car which definitely isn’t; and up in a village hay-loft in Nazi-occupied France, a situation he’s no hope of repeating even if he felt inclined to.

He thinks of Noyce blinking with pleasure to feel the sun and the wind on his face; that day they were walking by the lake. Poor bastard doesn’t get out, much. So it might be nice to do this to him – for him, outdoors. Down in the long grass – that’d hide them, or if there was a bit of garden, somewhere secluded and private; a place they could go to be alone together with the sun warm on their backs. He says as much to Noyce then, and even if George has no idea what he’s getting at, it doesn’t stop him from answering Teddy with a shy little crooked smile that shows his good nature and – god help him – just makes Teddy want to rush in and have a good try at sweeping him off his feet.

So, yes, when Teddy’s undercover work here is done and his fellow agents come to take him back to the outside he swears he’s going to get George out with him too, and then perhaps they can go someplace like that -

Teddy squeezes his eyes shut, for a moment experiencing a plunging, stomach-dropping sense of disconnection -- a split-second, unshakeable conviction that there’s something terribly wrong with that picture; and then reality or at any rate one interpretation of it sharply reasserts and snaps him back.

“Teddy?” Noyce is saying, eyeing him cautiously. And then, much more quietly, “Andrew?”

“Ah, sorry, Georgie. Felt a goose walk over my grave.”

“Mm, I saw,” Noyce replies, shifting uncomfortably beside him. “Look, Teddy, I’m not so sure
about this. We shouldn’t –“ and there he goes getting the wrong idea again so Teddy leans over and kisses him, just to shut him up. The kiss deepens and maybe Teddy’s not doing this just so his friend will stop talking and it’s true that they don’t have a daisy-covered bank or a bed or a car or even a draughty French barn. They’ve got not enough blankets and a couple of pillows between them and the cold prison floor - but what Teddy does have is Noyce where he wants him for once and they’ve got the rest of the night to spend together and anyway, who knows what’s going to happen after that.

As in the prison laundry, when he looks at George it’s as if he can see him through some weirdly fractured kind of double vision. Through one of the lenses Noyce only ever rates as being odd and unattractive; he’s no more than barely acceptable-looking at best. But perhaps the view through the other one is softer, or kinder, or possibly even focused on something else entirely because seen in a not-too-radically different light Teddy thinks Noyce is –

Take his hands for example. They’re narrow with large knuckles and all the nails are bitten right down to the quick. There’s a scattering of hair on the backs of them that shows up dark against his overly pale skin, with more on the wrists, which still bear the marks of being handcuffed in the form of faint yellow bruises because he fought so hard against his restraints and, overlying the bruises, a double line of long ugly welts that don’t heal because he scratches them raw every time, as soon as they begin to scab over. The latter, especially, is pretty disgusting; Teddy has had words with him, but he really doesn’t seem to realize he’s doing it. So, Noyce’s hands: both odd and unattractive.

But they’re extremely expressive. Teddy noticed that a good while before they even started – all this. George can’t always get all his words out but if you want a good look at his state of mind, all you have to do is to look at his hands, whether he’s pensive and hugging them round his shoulders for comfort, or flapping in a panic, or, more rarely, holding them calm and steady and relaxed, it’s kind of fascinating, the way that through them you can see exactly what’s going on in his head.

And when Teddy’s kissing him as he is now, kissing the palms and the backs of his hands and Noyce’s knuckles, and even the wounds on his poor injured wrists as they lie together and George is tracing his brow and Teddy’s cheekbone and his jaw-line with his fingertips, the look on his face poised somewhere uncomfortably between disbelief and open wonderment - well, damnit, there’s really nothing wrong with him, and Teddy thinks he’ll have a thing or two to say to anyone who tries to claim there is.

As for accepted standards of normality, it’s quite possible that Teddy’s the abnormal one, because he’s pretty sure normal men don’t in general want to kiss one another on the dick. Teddy however wants to do that to Noyce’s because lately he’s been thinking it’s kind of gorgeous; not in and of itself, necessarily – the damn thing’s just a fairly average cock – but because of the pleasure this will undoubtedly bring Noyce. Daniels hasn’t much frame of reference; hasn’t been gone down upon all that often himself but he’s gotten a great deal of enjoyment out of every instance he has had of it. He just hopes he can manage to do this right.

He takes things slowly at first because surprising Noyce has only yielded mixed results so far; unbuttons the front of his pyjamas to begin with and sucks the pink little nubs of his nipples into his mouth one by one, which makes Noyce jump. All on course so far and nothing to worry about; everything makes Noyce jump. He moves lower, down his chest to his belly, and that’s enough to set George off.

He rests one hand, lightly, on Daniels' shoulder - warning him off. “Teddy!” he’s saying.

Daniels isn’t listening to him.

“- s’a bad idea,” Noyce perseveres. “I don’t think you wanna –“
“Shush, Georgie,” Teddy tells him and puts his hand on him, fondling his erection through his pants. George is hard, all right. Poor sap can’t seem to help himself. Oh but yes, Daniels thinks, he so does wanna. “Relax. I got this. Really.”

It does things to Teddy it probably shouldn’t, the knowledge that he’s the first to do this to Noyce - or with Noyce, whatever; just as he supposes that the idea of putting his mouth on his friend probably ought to, and yet doesn’t at all faze him.

What Teddy’s not expecting is for there to be anything other than vicarious enjoyment in it for him. There’s enough of that, of course; Noyce’s reactions as he begins licking and kissing the sensitive skin are more than gratifying but the feel of his stiff dick in Teddy’s mouth and even the way Noyce tastes – well, he has to stop not long after he’s started to compose himself, because if the thought of doing this was enough to get him hard, the sensations he’s getting already have Teddy right on the brink of coming after only about a half a minute or so in.

It isn’t until George comes, however, that Teddy does too. Right into his pyjamas, up against Noyce’s leg. And there’s nothing he can do about it, nothing at all: just one of those things.

At the critical moment he’s pressing his friend’s narrow hips to the floor. No choice about that either. Not that Noyce has been trying to move, much; not in movements congruent with coitus in the conventional sense at least. There’s been next to no rocking or rolling with his hips or thrusting, although Teddy has a very strong suspicion that he might be thinking about making some last-ditch effort to move away - hence the need for a firm hold to keep him in place.

Up until this point George has only tended to touch him very tentatively indeed so the sudden, tight grip of his hand in hair catches Daniels’ attention.

“Teddy, please,” he says, wheezing faintly, “- please. Stop - you gotta! M’gonna –“

“Nn’ mmh,” Teddy mumbles, meaning to say ‘no’ and he darts a quick look up the length of Noyce’s body - only to find George staring frantically back at him. And - ah, jeez, yes – it’s the look in his eyes that does it for him again; that makes Teddy groan in the back of his throat as he bears down on his friend’s hips while at the same time George, like he really can’t help himself, sort of pushes back or spasms into his mouth and – and well, seems that’s going to be enough to finish them both.

George’s gone, he’s done for and Teddy feels a jolt in his stomach as a hot rush of fluid releases out of him into his mouth. He closes his eyes and tries to swallow some of it. Admittedly, the taste is kind of rank but just the idea, that he’s been able to give George an orgasm from doing this makes Daniels start to come too. Okay; so they don’t really manage to time it together. Noyce has gone limp and slipped free by the time Teddy, face lying on his friend’s stomach, is clutching himself desperately and spilling into his own pants but it’s still something. Teddy thinks it’s pretty damn fantastic, actually.

Teddy’s got some of Noyce’s release on his face, that, or could be it’s his own spit – it’s slick and it’s wet but everything smells of George already so he can’t be sure. He wipes himself hurriedly and plonks himself down on top of him, grinning.

“Fuck, George, fuck,” he says.

George stares back at him, more than a little shell-shocked. “What d’ja do that for?” he stammers, and honestly doesn’t seem to know.

“George!” Teddy groans, “what c’ha talking about? I mean you liked me doing that, right?”
Noyce nods, helplessly. “But, Teddy, you shouldn’t’ve. Should never have let me –“

“Screw that,” he mutters, leaning in to embrace him, but pulls up short, suddenly bashful. It’s only a minute ago Teddy had a full measure of George’s come in his mouth and he’s not at all sure how the etiquette works in such a situation -

But George, uttering one of his pained little noises of distress, has already got both arms clinched tight around Teddy’s neck and is kissing back messily, kissing all over his face and his lips and his chin – doing his best to clean himself off of Teddy, which would be Daniels’ best guess if he had to say what impulse is motivating his friend at this point - and really, he can’t have that. So he simply holds onto Noyce, speaking soft words of reassurance to keep him steady until he stops panicking, to calm him down and god knows, they could both do with a bit of that. At length George settles beside him on the floor, and Teddy curls himself around him, keeping him close.

Okay, so sometimes it can be an uphill struggle, dealing with Noyce’s emotional difficulties and myriad general hang-ups. But in dealing with George you have to bear in mind that at some point someone’s fucked with his head and messed him up deeply, so it’s not his fault he’s been left in this, frankly disturbed state. Even if in some bizarre ideal world there was to be a choice, Daniels doesn’t think he’d want him much different from how he already is - and – gosh! Isn’t that such a peculiar preference that if Teddy was ever to think the thing over, odds are it might make him wonder if the shrinks aren’t all right after all and he isn’t genuinely out of his mind. But, as he lies there beside him Teddy still isn’t worried. Not one bit.

Also, he wants to do what they just did again.

TBC
Daniels hasn’t forgotten. He hasn’t wavered from his course and is dead set on completing his imaginary mission: won’t rest till he’s located Dolores’ killer and extracted revenge. This compulsion has been driving Teddy for literally as long as he’s existed and is not something that could easily slip his mind.

It’s all still right there in his head, really it is. It’s just maybe after this – thing with Noyce started, he might be getting a little…. sidetracked.

Sure, Teddy knows about pain. After the events of two summers ago he’s no stranger to all kinds of pain, emotional turmoil and heartbreak, but up until now at Ashecliffe he’s had a cloistered existence. Early on and following a number notably violent incidents his fellow patients quickly learned to fear and avoid him and so, left alone with his grief and delusions, Teddy’s been living out a fantasy of his own making, his most significant interactions in the meantime being with the phantoms who inhabit it. But that’s all he’s been doing for more than two years; sinking ever-deeper into paranoia and stubbornly resisting treatment.

Lately George has been – not a stabilizing influence, exactly, although his arrival in Teddy’s life has had something like that effect, because his presence has brought with it a much-needed sense of reality, and that’s long overdue. Daniels might be capable of deluding himself to a quite remarkable extent, but he’s an intelligent man and not completely oblivious to his situation. Reality, versus Teddy’s world-view represent opposing psychic forces and he’s caught between the two, his position in the long-term being so untenable that more than likely one or other of them will end up swamping him, or that working in concert they’ll pull him apart. This much has already been known to happen, as signified by Daniels’ many breakdowns and previous regressions, after all.

The funny thing is that when George is with him Teddy doesn’t feel like he’s in quite so much danger of disappearing or drowning - and that could be for no other reason than he’s actually there in the cell for Daniels to talk to.

Noyce would laugh at the idea of being considered a lifeline to anybody. He conspicuously hasn’t managed to help even himself, so far, let alone any other person. When they put all those drugs in him, back in the forties, it’s like they opened some kind of door - for things, that might or might not exist outside of Noyce’s head and like Teddy he occasionally sees - and hears things that objectively he knows can’t possibly be there. This is why George quakes with fear so badly sometimes, and one of the reasons why he sometimes finds it difficult to speak. So, if there’s an opposite state from being a calm and soothing influence, that’s pretty much what Noyce’s day-to-day condition is.

But for some reason it seems to work in Daniels’ favour. It’s possible that prolonged exposure to George’s high-level anxiety is helping alleviate a little of Teddy’s; or perhaps a slight shift of focus onto someone else’s troubles is cancelling out some of the effects of Daniels’ own. It’s been a long time since he’s had a chance to be the level-headed, steady one and he finds he still relishes the role.

Laeddis isn’t cured, *per se*; never will be while Teddy is around, but since Noyce arrived at the hospital he’s calmer than he has been in years, saner, in a way, and as far as outbreaks of violence and emotion go, much more in control. Laeddis’ doctors don’t appreciate that George could be the cause of it, even as they log and note his therapeutic effects.

And because of their obliviousness, it never does occur to any of them – before or even after, to wonder what might happen if the emotional prop that Teddy’s come to rely so heavily upon should suddenly and unexpectedly be removed.
This time, Noyce is reciprocating.

Which is to say, he’s trying.

Before he met Noyce Teddy would’ve believed there was a man alive who doesn’t know the way to jerk off properly.

That’s before he met Noyce. Now, on the other hand? Now he’s experiencing his technique he’s not so sure. George is squeezing too hard and heaving away like he’s trying to ring in the New Year and obviously has little idea what to do with his hands.

And - it’s just awful.

“Didn’t you just tell me people used to pay you for this?” Teddy asks, thinking he might try and lighten the mood. On hearing that George’s mouth compresses into a tense little line and he gives Teddy a dark look, frowning up at him in a way that makes him dearly wish he hadn’t said anything. Especially since right now Noyce is holding Teddy’s dick in his right hand and already has a pretty tight grip on it.

“Oh. Well,” George says, “I didn’t have to do much. Mostly I’d just stay still long enough so’s they could screw me, see?”

That Noyce is able to talk this way, on this particular subject, to Teddy, means his statement is in its own way almost a measure of how far the two of them have come.

Teddy has only the vaguest idea what men like Noyce who...like men like to do. He’s aware that it has to do with ass-holes – and he’s not stupid; can broadly figure the mechanics of it out for himself. There’s only a limited number of options as to what goes where so it’s not like he needs someone to draw him a picture, but he’s just not certain he can see how the – ins and outs- of a thing like that might actually...work.

Upshot is, he broached the subject with Noyce earlier, just after they’d been locked in their cell for the night. Has Noyce, he says, trying to put it delicately, ever had relations of...that sort?

George blinks anxiously. Of course he’s had sex before. It isn’t a happy memory and he speaks without thinking.

“After the, uh – police picked me up like I told you an’ all? Kinda had a falling out with my folks. Said they, eh, said they didn’t want to know.”

Noyce goes back to his parents’ house just once, late one night at the end of first summer he ran away.

At around the same time the previous night he was in an alley between two waterfront warehouses, bent over a large wooden shipping crate and taking an energetic and technically, consensual ass-fucking from an anonymous client. The time that’s elapsed from their first verbal contact - which began with the man’s tentative propositioning of him, to the position they currently find themselves in is a very short period; bewilderingly brief and when - much later - he has a chance to collect his scattered thoughts, it occurs to Noyce that having seen his youth and inexperience perhaps the john’s deliberately taken advantage of him. Still, George thinks, clinging to his crate for balance as he bites his lips to keep from crying out in tandem with the man’s rhythmic, and increasingly powerful
thrusts, at this stage the extent to which he’s been railroaded is only ever going to be something of a moot point.

After he’s finished the man wipes himself off on a crumpled banknote which he slings at George in payment, buttoning his flies as he walks off into the balmy, moisture-laden night. Noyce, on his hands and his knees down in the garbage is already in a bad way; feels sick and afraid and knows his backside is bleeding – is too scared of what he’ll find to be able to touch the damaged area as yet, but even through the ghastly liquid slip and slide between his buttocks, he’s pretty sure that something there’s gone awful wrong. He has a lot of other things to deal with and yet over and above all that it’s the simple sight of that banknote smeared with blood and filth and...other fluids that does Noyce in. He’s been brought so low that at this stage he thinks he’ll consent to anything; a stay in the mental hospital, more corrective therapy, whatever his parents want, if only they say they’ll let him come home.

But when he gets there he finds he’s no longer welcome. The next night he makes his way back to the house he grew up in, where George’s father, George Noyce Senior addresses him on the doorstep. The outside lamp is switched on and the big, furry, end-of-season moths drawn in by the warmth and light are batting and batting themselves against it, battering their fragile bodies to bits. As a child George to hated to see it, would do his best to save them, and that was probably a futile effort, too.

His father’s kept the front door’s shut; a fairly unambiguous statement, and through the glass door-panels Noyce can see that the inside of the house is dark. In the plain black panes Noyce can also see himself reflected quite clearly and notices for the first time how much his hair’s grown out these past few months, so it’s now down past his chin. It’s exactly the same type of hair as his mother has; soft and fine with a faint wave to it, light brown and – he realizes, gazing at his reflection with a sinking feeling, at this length definitely kind of girlish-looking. He tucks a piece behind his ear with some idea of disguising the feminine effect, and that’s another mistake because this clearly exposes the awful blue-black bruise - obviously a love-bite or something similar - that last night’s client sucked into the side of his neck. Noyce’s father sees it and his lip curls with disgust.

George Senior tells Noyce that theirs has always been a respectable family and that Noyce is a dangerous and profoundly damaging influence. They’ve a young daughter still living at home, in case Noyce has forgotten, and can’t afford to have George corrupting her, too, which means in future he’s not to visit or speak to them or write, or try to contact them in any way.

Noyce Senior goes on then, to blame Noyce’s mother at some length for the way he’s turned out which makes him start to square up to the older man, but at this time in his life he’s inexperienced still, and before he has the chance his father’s socked him in the face, knocking him down the front steps. The lights go on in the house after that and Noyce hears his mother calling her husband from inside.

George Senior answers that it’s nothing, he’s just been dealing with a pan-handling vagrant, that’s all. Noyce’s mother comes and stands in the window – and, incidentally, this is the last George ever sees of her because she dies shortly after her husband succumbs to a heart-attack, seven long years later when George is already in prison. He likes to think she doesn’t recognize him, sprawled out on their front walk in the dark, but has never been certain. Seems like she sure stands there looking out at him for a long time.

That didn’t work, so he goes back to where he was before.

It's not really so bad after the first time. At least George now knows what he'll be dealing with; exactly what to expect. A few of them try; want to make it easier for him, but Noyce won’t accept kindness from anyone and because they’re men and they’re paying customers, most have only instant
self-gratification in mind. So when they shove George into position then and then shove in, screwing him without preparation he really does think this is better. It reassures him in a way, the thought that this isn’t something he would ever do for pleasure.

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“So there I am, out on my ear,” Noyce explains. “You remember how things were back then - times were tough. Anyways, I landed up on the street for a while an’ you know how that goes. You get desperate enough, you’ll say ‘yes’ to pretty much anything. So, yeah,” he sighs, “that’s how I come to do - like you’re asking - before. You see what I’m getting at?” He sits for a moment and gives Teddy a pleading look, willing him to understand.

But Daniels still doesn’t grasp what Noyce is talking about and why should he?

“Let myself get fucked a few times,” Noyce grimaces, since he’s having to spell things out for him. “For money. All different men.” He looks up from the floor and meets Daniels’ eye. “But I ain’t had anybody do that to me since,” he tells him. “Never since then.”

Teddy stares back at him, and for a moment his expression’s quite unreadable. “How old you say you were, Georgie?”

The look of open sympathy his friend’s now wearing on his face, which he doesn’t deserve, makes Noyce feel sick to his stomach and he hugs his arms round his shoulders, staring down at his feet. “Plenty old enough to know what I was doing,” he replies. “Teddy. What I did. It was a long time ago an’ I’m not proud of it, but seeing how you seemta – well. I think you should – you still got the right to know. That I’m not a real upstanding type a’ guy.”

“These people George. They hurt you, didn’t they?”

Noyce firmly believes it’s no more than he had coming to him and snorts derisively. “Goes with the territory, doesn’t it?”

But Daniels, instead of being properly disgusted as he should be, actually sits down beside Noyce, goddamnit, and puts a companionly arm around him. “You know I wouldn’t do that,” he tells him earnestly - and now he’s actually hugging him! - “don’tcher? I’d never want to do anything to hurt you, Georgie. You’re clear about that, right?”

The compassion and understanding’s almost worse than goddamn sympathy, coming from him, and Noyce is on just the verge of telling Teddy so when the sonofabitch leans in and begins kissing him tenderly – yeah, tenderly! – on the mouth. He really is crazy, to want to do that to a man like Noyce, and after what Noyce has just admitted to him.

He knows he won’t be able to keep his head for very much longer, not if Teddy keeps kissing him the way he’s doing, so at that point Noyce makes an artless grab for him, fumbling his hands into Daniels’ lap.

Teddy’s brought George off using his hands and his mouth any number of times by now and he’s also come himself, in the process, on quite a few of those occasions: once or twice spontaneously more or less; sometimes – and he’s not proud of this – as the result of a little covert rubbing against Noyce, but most often just taking care of himself afterwards with his own hand. And it isn’t that Noyce hasn’t tried to reciprocate – mightn’t be much use at it, but the point here is that Daniels’ attentions have always been so focused in George’s direction that he hasn’t had much in the way of a chance for return.
So! This is something new.

It’s also kind of uncomfortable, what he’s doing, to say the least.

“Didn’t you do this for money, once, you said?” Teddy’s just asked, to which George makes his crude rejoinder. Teddy huffs out in amusement – more sure than he isn’t that Noyce intended that to be some awful kind of joke – and kisses his forehead, taking hold of and then carefully disengaging his hands. “We could maybe come back to that later, all right?” he says.

He has George get up and cajoles him into taking off his pyjama pants and jacket so he’s standing there in the nude. Actually this is quite an achievement in its own right; Daniels knows how reluctant Noyce is to be seen without the protection of his clothes. So Teddy undresses, to keep him company too. He isn’t a vain man but is aware of his own physical appeal, and while his body might have lost a little tone of late, it’s still muscular in most of the right places, and lean.

Teddy’s not sure yet what he has in mind. But he’s noted Noyce watching him sidelong sometimes, and seen him snatch his gaze away, embarrassed, even at times he hasn’t registered that Teddy’s noticed him. And if looking at Teddy is what George likes – well, what the hell! He’s got no intention of stopping him.

It never takes much. Breaks a bit of Daniels’ heart each time, how very little it does take to get George going, because what does that tell you about how long the poor guy's been going without this type of attention? Meaning that that thirty seconds or so of hand-on-cock action (and this was nothing more than Noyce's hand taking much too tight of a hold on Daniels' cock, mind you) has been more than enough to leave George already hard and leaking. Teddy doesn’t know why the sight of his friend in a state like that should have quite the effect it does on him. He stirs up all sorts of emotions in Teddy and, yes, one of those might be sympathy but it isn't all he's feeling towards him in this moment: nowhere close. There's carnal desire- fondness also. Profound willingness to please, a deep yearning for intimacy - and that's just off the top of the list.

So, he kind of shuffles down so he’s propped up on his shoulders half-lying off the bed; gets Noyce bracing his arms on the wall behind and leaning over him so his still-upstanding prick is – well, it is. About on a level with Daniels’ mouth.

Teddy’s planning to put his friend in a position where he’s little choice but to move his hips, and another thing that Teddy doesn’t know is why the thought of having George above him, sliding his dick in and out, and in and out his mouth should seem like such a good idea at this point in time, but it does. It really does.

Noyce, however, still needs persuading so Teddy’s supplying a little gentle encouragement and that’s when -

Thing is, this time Teddy’s forgotten to wait until after the evening rounds of room-checks, hasn’t he?

The door to their cell slams open. Orderlies rush in. It’s early, so Dr Cawley’s still on the wards and must have already been called for because then he comes rushing in. Actually stops in his tracks when he sees them and staggers back a step, repulsed. Then Cawley starts yelling - at Noyce, surprisingly. He seizes Noyce, still bellowing recriminations, pulls him away from Daniels and has him hustled out into the corridor. There’s a scuffle – a heated exchange - then he punches him in the face.

Teddy howls at the doctor, enraged, and makes a desperate lunge in his direction; a wasted effort, as the guards have already collared him. Someone’s calling for immediate sedation and as he fights and
struggles, he feels the needle-stick high up in his thigh.

Okay, so they’ve caught them both naked, *in flagrante*, and with retrospect it was a pretty comprising position. Given his history, they’re already putting the blame for all of it on Noyce, who was of course the one on top and later they’ll assume that Teddy’s nothing but a poor duped innocent who’s let himself be coerced into deplorable acts of perversion, all on another man’s whim.

Teddy supposes, as his vision slides out of focus and the drugs take him, that that’s probably what’s been most out of order about the whole thing.
Sitting day after day in his room in the isolation wing, and George isn’t a man who believes in much, anymore.

He doesn’t believe Dr Cawley, when he visits to speak to him in his cell. George’s room has thick batting covering the floor and walls but very little in the way of actual furniture, so they have to bring in a chair for the good doctor to sit upon. From there he addresses George in the position in which he’s been seated for the past three days, on top of his mattress pad down on the floor.

Cawley’s back to being his usual elegant, unruffled self and has obviously decided they’re going to be carrying on as if the incident in the corridor, wherein he berated and struck Noyce - a smaller man, a patient, and naked and restrained – never took place.

So Noyce especially doesn’t believe he’s for real when the doctor comes over all avuncular and understanding, and with his impartial psychotherapist’s hat on tries to tells Noyce that he shouldn’t feel too badly over the way things have turned out.

“That’s okay, doc, ‘cause I don’t,” Noyce says, but the head-shrink isn’t even listening. Just carries on with what he’s been saying regardless.

It’s easy enough to understand the attraction, Cawley tells him. Laeddis is a genuinely charismatic fellow; something that’s been remarked upon by all of the doctors and nursing staff who have had any level of dealings with him. According to Dr Cawley, the unconscious transference of emotion - of a person’s feelings, if you will, onto an idealized ‘love object’ - has long been hypothesized to play a role in the development of male homosexuality. And given Noyce’s existing proclivities; well, it was almost a foregone conclusion that he’d become somewhat fixated (again, to use the doctor’s phrasing) on the attractive, younger man. So, all in all George shouldn’t feel rejected when his friend comes back to his senses - or at least what passes for sensible in Laeddis’ case.

Because it’s a pattern they’ve seen recurring in the pathology of his illness over and again. A semi-stable period when he’s entirely himself, interspersed with increasingly frequent episodes, and then complete dominance of the Teddy persona, followed inevitably by complete breakdown: a fugue-state or refractory period during which he appears to briefly ‘reset’ back into Laeddis, with no apparent memory or recollection of anything that occurred during his time as Teddy.

On this occasion Laeddis has spent considerably longer stabilized and in character as Teddy Daniels than he ever has done before – and that’s unusual enough in itself to warrant further study. But now that something has triggered the breakdown phase of the cycle once again, the only important point to note as far as Noyce is concerned, is that when he recovers his friend will likely retain little or no memory of him. Or, as Cawley’s putting it – not looking at George as he fastidiously polishes his eyeglasses on his handkerchief - of the ‘recent, highly unpalatable association between them.’ In deference to his fragile mental state it’s going to especially important, the doctor tells George gravely, that he plays along with Laeddis; taking all his cues from Laeddis - when or if they should next meet.

That Teddy won’t be able to remember – won’t know him; even the thought of it makes George feel dizzy and a little sick. But he doesn’t believe that for a moment, either.

And then, as if to blithely explain away Laeddis’ / Teddy’s behaviour, Cawley talks to Noyce about
something he’s calling ‘situational homosexuality’ – a sociological phenomenon first recognized by the Romans and ancient Greeks, he says -


But the doc’s in teaching mode now and, warming to his subject, explains that this phenomenon still occurs quite commonly today, being found most often among individuals living in restricted, same-sex environments - such as military compounds, boarding schools, ships at sea -

Situational homosexuality! Can this guy be for real? Cawley’s trying to teach his grandmother, telling George about that one.

“Jailhouse turnouts,” Noyce interjects.

“I’m sorry?”

“Guys like that, they call ‘em ‘jailhouse turnouts’ where I come from,” Noyce explains, rolling his eyes a bit. “You don’t think prison counts as one a’ those heckuva restricted environments too?”

Cawley stares at him for a moment, as if he’s suddenly not sure what to make of him, or as if he’s seeing Noyce, really seeing him, for the first time. “Prison!” he exclaims. “How stupid of me. George, I was forgetting. Given your background naturally you’ll have ample experience of this, and at first-hand.”

“I haven’t, as a matter a’ fact,” Noyce replies mildly. “Seeing as guys like you keep saying how I’m sick in the head on account of it. I been -”

“Deliberately abstaining,” the doctor interrupts, nodding. “Which is to say in this case, choosing not to have sex. Good for you, George – good for you!”

George shrugs. “Abstaining.” And there he was thinking he’d only been keeping his dick in his pants. “You could call it that.”

“I seen a few of those guys,” he continues, “those situational homosexuals like you’re telling about? But you’re the doc, an’ all, doc, so you must know as well as I do, Teddy’s not like that.”

“‘Laeddis isn’t,’ you mean,” Cawley corrects him, not unkindly.


“Nevertheless, you can’t help but appreciate how unlikely it is for a person’s most basic preference to have undergone such a radical change, and literally overnight! This sort of alteration is simply unheard of. It’s really is best forgotten about,” the doctor tells him, “because up until this point Andrew has always been a normal, happily married man.”

Normal. As if George was ever in any danger of forgetting what Teddy is and what he, George, most definitely isn’t. “‘Normal’,” he repeats wearily, dropping his head. “Yeah, well, doc. I suppose you’re right about that.”

“I know I am,” Cawley says. “And George? Do try to put it out of your mind.”

But George can’t forget. He doesn’t believe in much: not god or religion, patriotism or politics. Not even in family any more, but he does his best to keep faith in Teddy; can’t help but try with a desperate, fervent hope to believe that his friend won’t fail him, that defeating the odds, the feelings he thinks they had for each other will endure.
Two more days pass with not another word, and then three days after Cawley came to speak to him, after George has stayed for almost a full week in his cell, they come and collect him. He’s taken to the prison refectory, which has been cleared of all but one table and a pair of chairs for the occasion, and they leave him there alone.

At length a number of orderlies, guards and one doctor enter. It’s Dr Sheehan, Cawley’s right-hand man - he’s also Teddy’s other supervising psychiatrist. Sheehan and the others are clustering round someone in the centre of their group. And it is! There’s Teddy - he sees him. Finally! George’s heart thumps heavily in his chest and he flushes, feeling his pulse jump and quicken in his throat. It’s an involuntary reaction, he tells himself, that’s all; not like he’s asked to feel this way or anything.

Snatches of conversation reach him. “Forty-two patients on wards A and B,” Teddy is insisting, “and essential for our investigation that we interview every one of them.”

A moment of impasse, and then the orderlies and guards begin falling back, trying to look as if they’ve merely been accompanying, instead of aggressively escorting their charge. This leaves Daniels, flanked only by Dr Sheehan and Noyce, together in the room.

“Young Noyce, Boss,” Sheehan tells him, using a peculiarly deferential tone that’s quite different from your regular psychiatrist’s standard bedside manner.

Giving Noyce an impassive stare, Daniels takes a seat on the opposite side of the table. He’s cold and distant and looks straight through him. “Patient’s name is George Noyce,” he says. “Violent, habitual offender. Current inmate of Ashecliffe Hospital, previously serving a life sentence at Dedham Prison, Massachusetts.”

He’s speaking exactly as if he’s making notes on a hand-held recording device – except there isn’t anything there, and when he pulls back his shirt-cuff and looks down to check the time it’s obvious he isn’t wearing a wristwatch. Apparently not noticing the lack of either instrument, Teddy carries on regardless. “Interview commenced 11.15am, August 27th 1954.”

“Okay, George.” Resting his elbows on the table, Teddy leans towards Noyce with a narrow-eyed, predatory grin. “My name’s Teddy Daniels, and I’m speaking to you today as a representative of the US Marshalls service. Now, we’re going to be taking things real easy this morning on account of your doctors here have told me you’re sorta slow.” He regards Noyce for a moment. “Think they’re right about you George?” he asks suddenly, cocking his head. “Would you tend to agree with your psychiatrists’ assessment? That you’re some kinda half-wit?”

Noyce shakes his head, and shrugs.

“You should call Agent Daniels ‘Sir’ or ‘Boss’ when you answer,” Dr Sheehan interjects, prompting Noyce.

George just stares back at him.

“It’s all right, Chuck,” Teddy says easily to Sheehan and then turning back to Noyce, speaks slowly in a clear, overly deliberate tone. “Well, I haven’t made my mind up about you yet, George, but if you’ll be straight with me, if you tell me the truth, I think we’re gonna be okay. You got that?”

Noyce nods, still smarting from the ‘slow, half-witted’ comment, and gives Daniels a shrewd look. “Think you’d be up to recognizing it if you happen to stumble across it ‘Agent Daniels’?” he says. “The truth, I mean.”
Daniels sits back and drums his hands on the table in a quick, syncopated rhythm. “See, Chuck?” he crows to Sheehan, laughing over at him. “Sharp as a tack. And you tried to tell me I shouldn’t bother with this guy on account of the doc there told you he’s retarded!”

“Now, George,” Teddy resumes, “now we understand each other better, I think you should know I’m treating this as an interrogation, and I’m sure you’ve been in prison long enough to know you know the drill. What we’ve got is a possible manhunt situation going on here, and the escaped inmate’s a party I hear you may be personally acquainted with.”

Teddy pauses, waiting for that to sink in.

“Our guy’s a fire-starter. Big man – stands more’n six foot, and he’s a handsome fellow – got some good distinguishing features too: one brown eye, one blue - and a scar that cuts right across his face.” Daniels makes a slicing movement down from his eyebrow to the corner of his mouth to indicate the extent.

“Man like that seems he’d be difficult to miss,” Noyce replies. “‘Boss,’” he remembers to add belatedly, in deference to Dr Sheehan. He sits there, sucking his teeth for a minute. “So, this fire-bug of yours got a name, Agent Daniels?”

Teddy nods slowly. “Sure he does. Sure. That’s why I’d like you to tell me what you know about a prisoner here named Laeddis. Andrew Laeddis.”

TBC
Well, then.

Two things are immediately obvious. First of all, what Dr Cawley told him is true. While they’ve been separated Teddy’s gone into another one of his fugue states or he’s regressed or whatever, and obviously has no idea who Noyce is any more.

In other news, he’s also gotten worse. He’s sweaty and dishevelled; his face is waxy-pale and Noyce wouldn’t be at all surprised to hear he hasn’t slept or eaten in about a week because Teddy looks weak and shaky and downright ill.

With his other hand, the one that isn’t operating a non-existent tape-recorder, he’s making a fist, clenching his hand so hard around itself that his knuckles are white and you can see the broken crescents in his skin where his fingernails are biting in. His whole frame’s shivering with tension and as for the look in his eyes – well, it’s clear that Teddy’s not altogether there. Sure, he may be going through the motions with his super secret agent stuff all right, but when he talks it’s like he’s not even bothering to pay attention to what he’s saying, like he’s reading his words off some tedious script.

And he doesn’t even know George’s name. Can’t recognize him. They were friends and then they were more that and how could he have let this happen? He’s been so stupid. He’s stuck carrying the can – only now it’s an empty can, because Teddy doesn’t know him from Adam whereas stupid, stupid George has been fool enough to let himself fall -

Of a sudden the room seems to tilt sideways sickeningly. A great rushing, a sound or sense of pressure is filling Noyce’s ears and he feels a low noise of distress start to build from somewhere deep inside; down - down past his breaking heart, originating beneath the region of his stomach -

-in love with a man who doesn’t really exist -

The sound coming from inside him is raw and anguished – feels like it’s going to hurt if he tries to stifle it but he swallows down decisively and sure, that helps him to compose himself, some.

– and what’s the point? Because Teddy doesn’t remember anything.

A wave of grief and weakness hits George a low blow and he hunches over where he sits, blinking hard for a moment until his vision starts to clear. He knows better than to expect that there was ever going to be a happy ending in store and all right, so, maybe it was a mistake for him to pin his affections on a madman. But how can his doctors expect him to go through with this – to have Noyce sit here right in front of Daniels and agree to answer his pointless questions nicely and be treated like a total fucking stranger when it’s so obvious, and if they’re supposed to be such goddamn experts in the field of human psychiatry, how can they not already be aware how Noyce feels about him?

Well of course they know. Of course they do, which must make this some special kind of cruel then, mustn’t it?

Dr Sheehan’s nodding to him, waiting for George to answer and it’s the mild, bland look of
encouragement – so crafty-eyed and fake – that he has plastered all over his handsome, smiling face that does it. Makes Noyce sick and oh, so tired of cringing and quaking, kowtowing and colluding with this clever-clever fellow and all the doctors like him.

George pushes his chair back from the desk and stands up, his jaw set.

“You wanna know about Laeddis?” he says. “Well, you come to the right place ‘cause him and me spent a lot a’ time together and I got to know your pal quite well. Yeah, you’re on the right track - ‘cause he’s here at Ashecliffe just like they told you. But if you really want to find him, someone oughta let you in on the big secret - that you got no chance doing it with this guy –” Noyce gestures towards Sheehan –“this fine-looking fucking sonofabitch trailing after you the whole time. He’s not your second-in-command or whatever the hell you think he is. He’s here to feed you a pack of lies, just like I am, ‘cause you’re the boss of nothing, so far as I can see. That’s guy’s a fuckin’ nuthouse doctor, an’ he’s here ‘cause you’re a patient in a fucking nuthouse, same as me –“

Dr Sheehan, who up until this point has been standing by observing (because they never like to prejudice their experiments, these doctors - just expect to be able to kick back and relax until they see what’s going to happen) now steps in to intervene. As Sheehan approaches, George deftly lifts the chair he’s been sitting in and swings it in an upward arc that catches the doctor squarely on the chin and knocks him flat on his backside. Daniels immediately jumps up, rushing to his partner’s defence.

“Take a look at your clothes!” George shouts, backing away as Teddy rounds on him. “Open your eyes an’ look! You really think you’re a federal fuckin’ agent? Then how come you’re dressed like that – same as every other looney-tunes an’ all the dumbass headcases? You’re not from the government and you’re not Teddy Daniels - you’re Laeddis. This guy you think you’re looking for, Andrew - Andrew fucking Laeddis? He’s you. They got you chasing your own tail – round an’ round in circles Teddy, round and round and round - but you won’t stop falling for it, and if you don’t wake up to yourself soon, there’s gonna be nothin’ you can do about it, you goddamn chump!”

Teddy answers all of that with an inarticulate scream and launches himself at Noyce, falling on top of the smaller man as he tackles him to the floor. His fists crash into George’s chest and sides, hitting him a welter of vicious blows.

Noyce has always told himself that when the day finally arrives, when Daniels snaps and really all-out goes for him, he’s only going to go as far as need-be to stop his friend in his tracks.

But now when it comes to it he’s barely able even to mount much of a defence. Daniels is bigger than Noyce is and he’s stronger – military trained, and at this stage also much, much better-motivated because George is heart-sick and dog-tired; maybe even a little bit in shock still, following the realization that Teddy doesn’t know him anymore, and soon finds he no longer has it in him to very much care. So until the orderlies come, Daniels beats him about the head, punching him repeatedly in the mouth – no doubt intending to punish him because he doesn’t like the truth he won’t recognize that’s just come out of it - until finally he picks Noyce up and dashes his face against the edge of the interview table. This doesn’t knock him completely cold but does stop him struggling as hard, so Teddy does it again - and again - and that’s what he’s still doing when the guards finally manage to pull him off him.

They haul Teddy away and sedate him. George drops like a broken thing.

Three days in isolation in Ward C, half-naked, alone with his grief and in pain, and Noyce has ample time to think about what he’s done. One of his guards in particular is especially unkind. The guard’s been stuck working the hospital’s least popular shift after all; down in the dark and the damp of a former Confederate prison with the constant howls and anguished cries from the last-stage lunatics caged here echoing through the dank air –
Well, it’s not a place anybody in their right mind would want to be. To begin with the guard taunts Noyce, describing the grisly fate his doctors are planning, that he’s seen them visit upon so many prisoners before.

They’ll cut though his scalp first, peeling it back from his head. Has Noyce, he wonders, ever skinned a rabbit? No? A pity, because it’s a lot like that. Next they’ll go with a bone-saw into the skull beneath, removing a section so they can meddle with his brain – examining it - and that’s when the fun starts. That’ll let them carry out all sorts of interesting experiments. Noyce has heard about Dr Naehring’s research back in Germany hasn’t he? Special projects focussing on the effects - and after-effects - of permanent brain injury; turned out in the event it wasn’t just lab animals he’d been working on so it’s no small wonder that afterwards, he had to get out of the country double-quick.

They’re always looking for new volunteers because it’s a little-known fact that Naehring's studies have been ongoing in a way – and what’s that? Noyce needs to try and calm himself. There’s no point in getting hysterical. If he, the guard, had a dollar for every patient he’d seen come through these hospital doors who reckons he shouldn’t oughta be here -! No, Noyce shouldn’t make a fuss. No-one’s going to take any notice, not of an inmate on transfer to Ward C, and what does he mean, he didn’t sign on for any of this? Doesn’t Noyce realize no-one signs on for it? Else there’d be no point in the doctors trying so hard to hide what they’re up to when they do this stuff.

Not to worry! Maybe they’ll just shuck Noyce open – make him jump and dance for them on the operating table for a spell. Looking on the bright side, when they’re done there might even be enough of Noyce left to warrant closing him up again. Not that there’s any guarantee because a lot of times, the guard tells Noyce, the mess the doctors make isn’t salvageable. If he comes through it odds are that what they’ve done will leave him as not much more than a blank-eyed, drooling vegetable. But it’ll be the end of his troubles because either way, he’ll no longer be Noyce once they’re finished with him.

After a time George falls silent, no longer weeping or even shaking with fear when the guard comes to torment him and the visits tail off soon afterwards. Aside from that, no-one speaks to him. Except that he sees Daniels once more towards the end and isn’t that a fucking barrel of laughs because in the interim Teddy’s apparently ‘reset’ - or however his doctors want to call it - *again.*

This time round he’s able to recognize George, at least, but still has no recollection of the time they spent together, or – conveniently enough – of his recent brutal assault on him.

Poor sap comes down to the dungeons one morning after a big storm knocks out the power-supply to the hospital. He’s still thinking he’s on the trail of the escaped prisoner Laeddis, a notion of which given what happened last time, Noyce doesn’t bother to disabuse him.

Through the bars Teddy examines his injuries. “Who did this to you?” he asks, appalled. Good old Teddy the great protector, forever wanting answers but inevitably to all of the wrong questions, as if he’s planning on going out and valiantly beating the tar out of whoever’s beaten the tar out of Noyce. Listening to him George really doesn’t know whether he should laugh or cry, which makes him start worrying he’s maybe losing his grip.

So they talk; Teddy refuses to see sense, and then, as usual, Daniels spends some time assuring George he’ll be coming back to save him.

*Yeah, right,* Noyce thinks, and he’s beginning to feel a bit resentful, having to constantly go through and through this same old shit with him. If he wants them to keep doing this, his former friend’s really going to need to get his hands on some new and greatly improved material.
At the end of it off Teddy goes again, away on his imaginary chase.

And, shortly after that the doctors take Noyce to the lighthouse where they lobotomize him. Maybe he’s one of the lucky ones because he survives the operation.

Or then again, maybe not.

TBC
Teddy Daniels was always getting fixated on things. Any, and all sorts of things: big, wide-ranging issues; personal matters past and present, clues and codes (his speciality) and all the seemingly insignificant details in between. He’d obsess about the lot.

You could say this was the problem with him, really.

It’s after the hurricane. The psychiatrists are confident Teddy’s gone now, and with Laeddis taking his first, hesitant steps on the road to recovery he’s being allowed a little leeway around the hospital.

Those lightly supervised walks he’s taking in the grounds when the weather’s fine appear to be doing him good. He runs into his former cell-mate early on during one of them and barely a glimmer of recognition results.

His doctors consider this a very good thing.

That first meeting apparently came about by accident.

It doesn’t happen again.

Now he’s back to being Andrew, Laeddis might’ve lost a little of his single-minded focus, but he’s gained some clarity and perspective. Maybe he’s not concentrating on life’s minutiae to quite the same extent but that’s not to say he’s become complacent, or oblivious. He’s still suspicious. Always taking notice, still.

One of the things he comes to notice is that it’s a bit odd, how he never sees George Noyce at all these days, isn’t it? Has he been transferred back to prison, perhaps?

He asks his doctor about it. Gets told Noyce is still at the hospital. He’s currently an inmate of Ward C.

That doesn’t sit right either. Ward C’s reserved as on-site housing for only the most dangerous and violent of Ashecliffe’s resident lunatics. And the last time Andrew saw him - that day in the grounds, Noyce was weak as a kitten and barely present in his own head. He’s no longer much of a danger even to himself.

Why is Andrew asking about Noyce just now, Dr Cawley wonders.

“Ah, no special reason,” Andrew says.

Even if wasn’t in his right mind for all of it, he’s been Cawley’s patient for two years now. The doctor’s goal might’ve been to get to know him, but at the same time he’s gotten to know his psychiatrist in return. And Cawley might try to hide it but Laeddis can see that he’s rattled, the subject of George having somehow put him on alert - so he takes care not to mention him during their next meeting, or the meeting after that. But the next time he sees Cawley he asks if he thinks it might be a good idea for him to meet with Noyce, all the time keeping his tone even and his expression carefully blank.
“I been thinking about what happened,” Laeddis explains, “an’ I feel bad for what I did - beating on the little guy like that, even if I was – confused, thinking I was you know - some other joe at the time. I’d sure feel better if I could tell him how sorry I am and all.” Andrew knows how much his doctors appreciate him talking about what he’s thinking and how he’s feeling, so he puts those parts in especially. He holds his breath and does his best to look nonchalant as he waits for a reply.

Cawley doesn’t answer straight away. Cocks his head and eyes Laeddis beadily for a moment, obviously weighing up his options.

Then tells Andrew yes, of course he can see his old friend.

‘Old friend,’ Laeddis notes. Well, it’s nice to have confirmation. His memory of the time they spent together is as hazy as ever, but he’s already concluded Noyce must have been something like that.

Andrew’s doctors sure do like to know about his thoughts and feelings, and now that he’s come to acknowledge, and accept responsibility for shooting Dolores, his treatment at the hospital’s consisting of not much more than having to constantly be yakking on and on to various concerned citizens about it. He’s still being prescribed a cocktail of sedatives, but spends much of his time in psychotherapy; engaging in one-to-one sessions with his doctors, in which Andrew describes how he’s managing to come to terms with his actions, as well as past events.

Given that Laeddis’ past coping techniques involved the brutal slaying of his spouse followed by a two year series of complete psychotic breakdowns, naturally they’re keeping a pretty close watch on him at this point.

Now, talk therapy’s all very well but as much as Andrew’s encouraged to talk, it’s been apparent from the outset that certain subjects are off-limits; the unprepossessing specimen currently standing in front of him being the main case in point.

Dr Cawley has been as good as his word and has arranged a meeting for Laeddis with Noyce. Only a day after he made his request and they’re in an interview room, the three of them: Andrew, George and the orderly from the secure ward who fetched Noyce in.

Laeddis’ former cellmate isn’t much to look at. He’s pale, small and unkempt, and his light blue eyes are unfocussed and dim.

Andrew can’t explain it, but he’s truly and honestly overjoyed to see him.

Noyce doesn’t rush into his arms, probably because he’s barely able to walk. Instead he makes progress in a determined sort of chain-clinking shuffle straight over to Andrew as soon as he sees him and when he gets there actually tries to tuck his head onto Laeddis’ shoulder, standing embarrassingly close.

As Laeddis is drawing back from him in confusion, the orderly clasps Noyce by the arm. “Now, you know better than that, don’t you George?” he says to him in a clear, no-nonsense tone. “There's no physical contact allowed.”

George ignores that, looking up at Andrew as if for confirmation of what the attendant’s said and for a split second seems to search Laeddis’ flustered face. Then his head drops down between his shoulders again and hangs, defeatedly. He steps away from him at once.

After that they speak, seated at a table. Or at least Andrew speaks, asking how Noyce is and how he’s doing – wincing inwardly as he hears himself trotting out a predictable string of trite, hospital-visitors’ questions, all the time under the orderly’s bored, yet watchful gaze.
Noyce sits hunched in his seat, staring down at the formica table top or off into space, for most of it.

Just before the end the orderly, who’s started smoking a cigarette, gets distracted by a squabble over by the nurses’ station outside. Leaning eagerly towards him, Andrew places his hand over Noyce’s, where he’s resting them on the scratched plastic table, alternately holding them still and cracking his knuckles fretfully.

“You okay?” Andrew whispers.

George jerks his hands out of reach and shoves them down in his lap.

“...no...physical contact,” he says, not looking at Laeddis, parroting the orderly’s phrase in a papery-thin, ghost of a voice.

The orderly turns his attention back to them, clearing his throat. “You look like you must be gettin’ tired, Mr Noyce,” he informs George, and then asks Laeddis, “think you seen enough yet? He gets real tired real easy, so if you’re about all done here, it’s time we better be getting back.”

“George?” Andrew insists, appealing to him.

Noyce pauses. “....must be....gettin’ tired,” he echoes after a long moment, and if he sounds uncertain, that’s probably because he’s only repeating what somebody else already said.

***

It’s not during their next session together, but about half way through the one after that Dr Cawley asks Laeddis, quite casually, how he thinks his meeting with Noyce went.

“He’s different to how I remembered him,” Laeddis acknowledges, feeling nonplussed.

“That’s right,” Dr Cawley says.

“And he seems kinda – flat,” Andrew perseveres.

Cawley nods in agreement. “After all, the procedure we’ve carried out is recommended primarily for its - levelling effect. What we’ve aimed to do is to alleviate the inappropriate emotional outbursts and unruly kinds of behaviour your friend was once prone to - but, in consequence, he’s now much less likely to experience any excesses of emotion at all. It’s unfortunate, Andrew, but no treatment comes without its side effects.”

Laeddis stares at him.

“In the wake of his assault on Dr Sheehan,” Cawley explains reluctantly, “we were left with little choice but to operate. Given that your friend has a history of similar, unprovoked attacks directed towards psychiatric personnel, the situation simply couldn’t be allowed to continue.”

“But it’s a side effect – that means it’ll wear off, right?” Andrew pleads, grasping at straws.

Cawley shakes his head. The procedure’s irreversible, and is intended to be permanent. “You should hope, for your friend’s sake,” he warns Laeddis, “that it doesn’t.”

“So he’s gonna stay like that?”

“It’s more than likely,” the doctor replies. Then he changes the subject.

***
After that Noyce is off-limits again, both as a person and a topic for discussion, and he stays that way through the end of the autumn and beginning of winter.

Then, half-way through December, Dr Cawley invites Laeddis to a social engagement.

“It’s....a seasonal celebration,” Cawley tells him, looking pained.

(‘Christmas party,’ Laeddis thinks.)

The doctor goes on to tell Laeddis that the upcoming gathering is to be attended by some important people, that if he’s agreeable, Cawley wants Laeddis to meet.

“Hospital governors?” Laeddis suggests, hazarding a guess. Cawley smiles, with a sickly, ingratiating expression. Yes, he tells Andrew, some of the board of governors will be in attendance, as well as....other persons of import.

“Huh,” Laeddis says. Now, he knows the doctor’s completely dedicated to his profession, pretty much to the exclusion of everything else. So what sort of someone would make the grade for being described as a ‘person of import’ in a man like Cawley’s point of view?

‘Big-shot psychiatrist’ is the about only conclusion Laeddis can draw from that.

He has a pretty shrewd idea what’s going on. For the past three months Andrew’s kept from rocking the boat. He’s been frank and honest, has played the game in his therapy sessions and his doctors have, to put not too fine a point on it, been downright amazed by the progress he’s been making lately. They’re scientists, so don’t care to talk about ‘miracle cures’ or use phrases like it but as for Cawley’s grand experiment? Well, in Laeddis’ case, it appears to have worked.

It may be premature, but the doc’s in full publishing mode now - getting ready to write up the results of his experiment, and because the turnaround in Andrew’s condition has taken place so quickly, it’s only natural that he should want to secure a second opinion or two.

“You want me to talk to some other head-shrinks at your Christmas shin-dig,” Andrew concludes.

“On a completely informal basis,” Cawley assures him.

Laeddis takes his time before replying. “Be an odd sorta situation, wouldn’t it?” he says at length. “Kind of one of those – imbalances, like you guys talk about, being the only the patient in a room full of doctors? Think about it. Just me, stuck there, sitting on my thumbs.”

Cawley waves Andrew’s misgivings away, assuring him there’s no reason for concern, that he’ll certainly be among friends at all times.

“Yeah, friends, you say. But you want these guys to, well - examine me, don’t you, doc, and I’m not so sure how I feel about that.” Laeddis frowns, breaking off from speaking for a moment. “Say doc,” he says eventually, letting on like the thought only occurred to him just recently, "maybe - maybe I'd feel better if I could have someone be there with me. Like an old pal, or someone I knew from before...."

For a smart guy, Cawley’s remarkably slow on the uptake. He still doesn’t understand what Andrew’s talking about.

“It’s Christmas on the secure ward, too,” Laeddis ventures.

The doctor sits back in his chair, giving him a long, assessing look. What it really comes down to is:
how much does Cawley want to get started on publishing those journal articles of his?

He wants that very much, as it turns out. “It’ll be a one-off,” he tells Andrew. “And rest assured there will be conditions attached, none of which are likely to be acceptable to you.”

TBC
Dr Cawley’s warning doesn’t worry Laeddis unduly. They’ve cut into his brain once already so really, what else do they think they’re going to do to Noyce – re-lobotomize him?*  

The temperature takes a sudden drop, with a later forecast for snow, on the day the members of the hospital board and the psychiatrists Cawley’s invited arrive at the hospital. They come in by ferry from the mainland.

(Given they’re receiving the full VIP treatment, it’s probably safe to assume that in contrast to most of Shutter Island’s usual intake, none of this select group will have spent their boat trip in chains below deck.)

They’re dining early in the evening, after which they’ll be engaging in what Dr Cawley persists in calling a casual after-dinner chat, by which he means the interviews he’s scheduled for his Laeddis and his colleagues. There are three of them; two university professors and a specialist in psychiatry from the mental hospital in Charlestown.

Informal chat or not, apparently someone wants Andrew to look his best for the occasion: he’s given a loan someone else’s lounge suit, clean shirt and old college necktie in plenty of time and then when the time comes he’s escorted up to the big house – for once not wearing restraints or a strait-jacket or even with an armed guard training a gun on him; just accompanied by a single orderly, like regular folks taking a walk together, so far as he can tell.

He’s been in the governor’s mansion once before of course, during his ‘investigation’ when he was Teddy, but at the time was drug-addled and to use a euphemism, sorely confused - so it’s excusable if his memory of the place is...hazy, at best.

The brilliantly-lit reception room they take him to is already full of people and it’s really rather grand. Laeddis draws his shoulders back, stands up a little straighter and okay, so he can admit to being a little fazed, maybe, by the circumstances and setting. After all, he hasn’t been out of the psychiatric wards, let alone in mixed company, in a long time.

He soon sees a familiar face – it’s Dr Cawley, who’s standing close by. Laeddis makes a beeline for him and immediately asks about Noyce.

It seems the doctor’s also been on edge, waiting for him. Perhaps he’s been having a drink or two, just to steady his nerves - but if he has still remembers to turn to face Andrew and speak softly so the ground-rules he’s about to set down for him won’t be overheard.

“George Noyce,” he groans, closing his eyes. “Really, Andrew. Tonight of all nights, must you persist in holding – that wretched person – uppermost in mind? Can’t you see what’s at stake? After two years of fruitless attempted treatment, at last I’m able to envision a future – some sort of normal life for you outside the walls of this hospital. Don’t you realize I’ve arranged your meeting with the board and hospital governors this evening with a view to securing your eventual release? We’ve a real chance here for rehabilitation and in the light of that, can you honestly say you want to be associated with a known degenerate - to be seen in company with an individual of that man’s calibre - and type?”
“Well, yeah,” Laeddis replies slowly. “I hear what you’re telling me, and I’m grateful for what you’ve done and all Dr Cawley, but if it comes down to it – I guess I’d say I’d rather George did show up here, than not. Is that – is there gonna a problem with that?”

“The main problem I might find with this situation,” Cawley informs Laeddis, “would probably be that your pet...pocket lunatic is hardly in any condition to be considered a useful endorsement of the type of non-invasive psychiatric practices that – citing you as a prime example - I’m currently attempting to advocate. The man’s been put through a lobotomy, for godsakes! Therefore I’ve decided it’s counterproductive for him to be present at a gathering of this sort. It’s been a unilateral decision, and I’m aware it runs contrary to the terms of our original agreement. I’m sorry, Andrew. But there you are.”

At first Laeddis is taken aback by the doctor’s vehemence, as well as his condition, which with every word he’s betraying as being definitely worse-for-wear. “But you said he –“

“Is in no fit state!” Cawley repeats emphatically, all but hissing through his teeth.

Andrew steps back from him, folding his arms against his chest. “Dr Cawley,” he says, “now, you made a promise to me –“

“Afterwards!” Cawley snaps.

“So, he’s here?”

“Yes, your friend Noyce is here,” the doctor sighs, “but Andrew, understand me. Officially, I suggest we go ahead and try and pretend he’s not.”

“I want to see him,” Laeddis insists. “Just quickly, before we get started. That’s all.”

Studying the stubborn, mulish expression on Laeddis’ face, Cawley sees he has little other option, and, with great ill-grace, relents. He ushers Andrew out into the hallway and then hurries him along a series of corridors to the back of the building.

Noyce is sitting on the floor, locked in a small cloakroom there, with a prison guard standing watch over him.

Laeddis immediately sees what Cawley meant when he talked about ‘unacceptable conditions’ being attached to his meeting with Noyce. George has obviously been doped up to the eyeballs, for starters, and he’s buckled into a filthy strait-jacket - urine-stained, reeking - and that, from the black ring of grime Laeddis can see on his friend’s neck, he clearly hasn’t let out of in quite a while.

Dr Cawley once told Andrew that shortly after its invention, the medical straitjacket was considered by prison reformers of the time to be a relatively humane form of treatment – allowing institutionalized patients an increased range of mobility, to the extent that even while strait-jacketed, patients could under certain circumstances even be permitted to venture outdoors to take the air, or for a therapeutic walk. The straitjacket was surely a better alternative, they reasoned, to being tied to a bed or chained.

Those asylum reformers probably hadn’t intended for it to be used quite like this.

As Laeddis watches, George squirms his shoulders and wriggles his elbows, half-heartedly attempting to stretch his tightly-bound arms. Laeddis looks on in sympathy, knowing from personal experience just how uncomfortable it is to be restrained in this fashion for any length of time.

Andrew crouches down, puts his mouth to the smaller man’s ear to try for privacy and speaks to him, all the while having no idea whether Noyce is registering any of this or not.
“Wastin’ your time there, bud,” the guard informs him. “Your pal’s out for the count. Already had enough tranquilizers put in him to knock down a horse. You wanna come back in coupla hours, after your swanky supper, maybe? Doctor Cawley told me if you do good, maybe afterwards he’s gonna let the two of you have your little talk.”

Well, that’s Cawley’s take outlined for him explicitly, with Laeddis’ reunion with Noyce contingent on how well he manages to impress the doctor’s cronies at tonight’s dinner. And what a surprise! Doesn’t that just put the icing on the cake – the swellest aspect of the entire, desperate situation. Now the only thing that Andrew has to do is to convince a load of other new, unknown, and in all likelihood extremely sceptical head-shrinks how insane, these days, he’s really not.

It’s small wonder then that Laeddis approaches Cawley’s two college profs and the Charlestown expert with trepidation, but really, he needn’t have worried. The questions they ask him – the answers they’re looking for him to give - turn out to be exactly as in the usual round of talk-therapy, and if Laeddis can’t pass himself off as normal by the end of one of those sessions after all this time, reckons he doesn’t deserve to be cut even a little bit of slack. This isn’t to say that he’s not telling the truth, but the acute pain of his memories is lessening now, and now when Andrew is asked to speak openly of his grief and his loss, he’s better able to cope. The memory of the trauma he’s experienced is still there - as it always will be, but repetition and the time Laeddis has spent mulling over and reiterating the same ugly facts is slowly diminishing its intensity.

So, if it’s a test they’ve been giving him he passes with flying colours or seems to at any rate, because after the interview sessions are done and the formal part of the evening begins to wind down Laeddis is permitted to look in on Noyce.

TBC

*Laeddis shouldn’t have been too sure about that. Melbert Peters, a WW2 veteran was the recipient of two successive lobotomies. [http://projects.wsj.com/lobotomyfiles/?ch=one](http://projects.wsj.com/lobotomyfiles/?ch=one)

His case history is by no means unique.

In 1954, following the failure of her first lobotomy to cure her of her paralysing anxiety, 24 year old Wilma Rogers was re-lobotomized - reportedly at her own request - and then went on to request a third lobotomy from Walter Freeman, who we met in Chapter 2, the ‘pioneer’ of the ice-pick lobotomy. Neither of the unfortunate Ms Rogers’ lobotomies were successful in treating her condition, and she took her own life two years later. This very sad story I suppose gives an alternate view of what is today considered to be a technique that’s reprehensible, barbaric and inhumane: it was not always universally considered as such, even by some of its recipients.

Outside at night

Hours have passed and it’s not long before midnight. The warder who was standing guard in the cloakroom has fallen asleep in his chair and is snoring there, with a now-empty sherry decanter clasped at his side. George, initially, is nowhere to be seen, but there’s a light draft coming in and behind the long heavy curtains one of the glass-panelled doors is standing open to the garden outside.

It’s freezing out there. Noyce has sidled through the French doors and onto the portico steps, and is standing just beyond the semicircle of warm, yellow light that’s spilling out through the windows behind him. He’s keeping still, leaning against a low garden wall, with his face upturned to the dark, wintry sky. As Laeddis steps up behind him he sees that Noyce has his eyes shut and the gently drifting snowflakes are settling on his brow and eyelashes.

This is the closest Andrew has been to his old friend in ages. They’re standing so close now that Laeddis can smell him, even through the strong unwashed tang of his canvas straitjacket, thinks he can still catch scent of the faint, oddly comforting smell that is Noyce’s personal odour. And he recognizes it – is surprised to find he knows it just as well as knows his own scent, and racks his brains trying to remember how such an intimate acquaintance could have come to pass, and once established, how on earth he could’ve managed to forget it.

Laeddis has to wonder again then about the strange thing his doctor said to him just after the hurricane and the second power-cut: when he referred so vaguely to ‘that unfortunate indiscretion’ involving George Noyce and claimed that Laeddis had been entirely blameless in the matter and not at all at fault; the conversation they had in which Cawley urged him to try to forget about it, the one they began before he realized that Andrew already did.

He’s wondered ever since then, if he’s honest. Andrew’s aware that George isn’t the same as most run-of-the-mill men; knows because he’s met other fellows like him before. Hell, there was one, maybe two in his unit back in Italy – and when they joined forces with Monty’s Army after Salerno he became acquainted with a few of the Tommies – officers as well as enlisted men - who were queer in that way too. The British command at the time seemed more willing than most to turn a blind eye, though he’s aware that the situation’s changed radically since then, most people now looking askance at men of Noyce’s sort. Andrew for one, still can’t quite see the problem –

Now he’s having a vague recollection that he’s followed this exact train of thought on at least one previous occasion before.

Shutting his eyes and trying not to feel foolish, Andrew stands for moment simply – sniffing; inhaling and enjoying George’s pleasantly scruffy aroma. It is, he realizes, almost achingly familiar; a smell Laeddis has come to associate most strongly with warmth and security, but there is also an undercurrent; a layer of deeper, perhaps even darker feelings he has for Noyce, just as strong but more problematic for him to acknowledge or properly define.

And being out here alone with Noyce like this, it’s an opportunity that’s landed in Laeddis’ lap and it’s.....well, this is probably the best, if not the only chance he’s ever likely to get.

Andrew makes a sudden move towards him, guides the unresisting Noyce into the shadows against the wall of the house and kisses him roughly, forcing his tongue between his slack lips. The other
man’s mouth is dry, with only a little saliva, tasting sour and of old spit but the sensation, so help him
Laeddis realizes, as a flood of recollection and half-forgotten memories come rushing back, is also
almost shockingly familiar. Dear god, yes, and now Andrew remembers: for a week or two there
they used to like to do this all the time.

George, however, shows no sign of recognizing Laeddis; remains completely unresponsive while he
pins him against the wall, manhandling him, and stays that way right up until the point when Andrew
remembers how he managed to get a reaction the last time. Mauling him about doesn’t work,
probably because the stoic Noyce is already intimately acquainted with – oh, all sorts of
inconsiderate treatment.

Kindness, however, is something he’s rarely expecting. Andrew draws back and stops doing his best
to stick his tongue down his friend’s throat. His over-enthusiastic attentions have left the lower
portion of Noyce’s face and chin wet and so, because it’s difficult for George to do it for himself,
Laeddis begins blotting his mouth dry for him – tries to set him back to rights and to feel more
comfortable; an unlikely prospect given the straitjacket he’s wearing but still, Andrew makes the
attempt.

There’s a moment before he tries again to kiss him, about the time when Andrew’s stroking his face
and speaking to him softly when – for just a fraction of a second – Noyce shivers and his nostrils
flare and he closes his eyes; but that’s right before he ducks down and comes bouncing back to
deliver a vicious head-butt to Laeddis - that catches him right across the nose and left cheekbone and
drives George’s forehead painfully up and into Andrew’s eye.

Andrew reels back, sitting down heavily in the snow on the low wall behind him and thinking that
Noyce isn’t supposed to be able to react violently to anything anymore, is he?

“Are you playacting?” Laeddis exclaims. “Have you been playacting all this time? You
sonofabitch!”

Noyce goes slipping and sliding on the wet pavement and crashes into him, snarling and slavering
through gritted teeth. He’s mostly unintelligible at first, growling and spitting like a rabid hound.
Andrew moves to help him keep his balance but he rears back from him, slips, and falls again,
landing heavily on his backside. Laeddis hefts him up and sits with him, supporting Noyce so he’s
lying partway across his knees.

George begins to cry. “Don’t think you’ve done enough already? Gotta try an’ trick me, too?”


“Your – all your pretty fucking talk,” Noyce seethes, ignoring him, flecks of foam beading out from
his mouth. “Listened to - all of it and now why won’t you – just leave me the fuck alone, Teddy. I
got –“ he lurches to his feet, fighting to keep his footing on the ice – “problems of my own an’-“

Laeddis is shaking his head, standing up, ready to assist. “No, George. I’m going to do everything I
can to help you, and –“

“You’re not!” Noyce snarls emphatically, eyes bugging out slightly from his head. “I see you an’
things get worse and fucking worse!”

“I’m going to get you out of here,” Andrew’s saying, but Noyce’s mouth opens in a muted scream
and he runs full-tilt at him - straitjacket and all – and his momentum carries the pair of them skidding
backwards straight over the parapet and into an evergreen garden shrub beneath.
It’s quite a commotion they’ve made and the two inmates freeze, holding silent and motionless under cover of their privet bush, but Noyce’s prison guard is still down for the count and as the minutes pass, no-one else from the house comes out to check on what’s happening.

“Gets worse, Teddy,” Noyce is muttering, eyes closed, up against his ear. “Worse and worse an’ worse. Every fucking time.”

“I’m here now,” Andrew assures him. “And you’re gonna be fine, George, I swear. It’s OK.”

“M’not okay,” George pleads. “Look at me, Teddy. Look what they done. Can’t - can’t even think straight. Hurts when I try – an’” – Noyce breaks off, dropping his head onto Laeddis’ shoulder. “Can’t think of anything cept - it's you. You're here again - an’ I want –“ groaning, he hesitates for a moment, and then suddenly he’s nuzzling at his jaw, mouthing clumsily and snagging with his teeth.

George, eyes still shut, manages to fumble his way to Laeddis’ mouth. The kisses he delivers are very Noyce-like, and at the same time – not. In the past Andrew’s always set the pace, but this time Noyce isn’t tentative, not at all – he’s fervent; forceful and frantic: kisses Laeddis desperately, like he’s running out of time.

He’s rutting against him too; grinding his hips on him and Andrew’s no idea how he’s managing to find room in that straitjacket - which he’s strapped into, tight across the groin, but Laeddis feels that Noyce’s dick is hard underneath the confining layers of fabric and the thought of that - god help him - makes lust or desire something go jolting through him so strongly that two seconds later and Andrew’s already so aroused he’s not far off from coming then and there, spilling right into his pants. The intensity of his reaction would embarrass him if it was anybody else. As it is, it seems spot on for Noyce however; Andrew doesn’t know why and he doesn’t care. He only knows it’s almost enough to overwhelm him on the spot.

The thought that this is the first time he’s knowingly having sex with a man – or at least, the first time he’s properly in his own head for it – doesn’t even occur to Laeddis. All he’s really thinking about is the best way he can get his friend to get off; how to coax an orgasm out of him, because for some unfathomable reason at this moment bringing pleasure to Noyce is about the only thing that’s on Andrew’s mind.

They don’t have time. Laeddis would like to get Noyce out of his straitjacket and to a place where it’s safe and warm and Andrew can take his time and get his hands properly on him. But they don’t have time and there isn’t a place like that, so all Andrew can do is to roll George so he’s lying uppermost, hook one arm and his leg around and try to help by pressing him close.

“Andrew? What about you?” Noyce mutters at one point, as he moves on top of him. He makes a helpless noise a moment later when looks down and sees Andrew unfastening his borrowed trousers and taking himself in hand. It’s been a while since he’s done this and at first he strokes lazily, touching himself just to show Noyce, but then the smaller man freezes and suddenly jams his head into the crook of Laeddis’ shoulder, whimpering in the back of his throat and shuddering. Laeddis whispers broken endearments to Noyce, comforting as much as he’s encouraging him, and holds onto George, tight, when his hips begin jerking uncoordinatedly against him.

George chokes out single a gasp of “Teddy!” into the side of Andrew’s neck when he comes; just a word but it’s so loaded with grief and charged with mixed feelings - and it certainly ought not to have the effect on Laeddis that it does.

Hearing it’s enough for Andrew, enough to make him start coming as soon as the words are out of
his friend's mouth. Taken by surprise he screws his eyes shut, pumping desperately with his hand and does his best to wring his orgasm out - to make it last longer - but that doesn’t work. Laeddis makes an undignified, pained sort of noise as he ejaculates and tries, but doesn’t quite manage to stifle the sound against the top of George’s head.

“Fuck, Noyce, fuck,” he tells him after a moment, after his heart’s stopped hammering so hard and he can trust himself to speak.

George gives a huff of amusement into Laeddis’ chest.

“Yeah?” Laeddis says, raising an eyebrow at him. “What’s so funny?”

“Ain’t exactly the first time I’ve heard you say that at a time like this.”

“It isn’t?”

“You don’t remember? No kidding?”

Andrew shakes his head and regards him seriously for a moment, considering. “But you do, don’t you George? Remember – all of you and me together, I mean.”

“Oh, I can remember all kinds a’things,” Noyces replies dryly. “Like that one time you got hold of some crazy idea you wanted us to do this outside.” He ducks his head, stifling a nervous snuffle of laughter in his nose.

“What’re you laughing about?” Laeddis says. "I don't get it."

“We outside enough for you yet?”

“Yeah? Well I meant it,” Andrew replies, “but I don’t mind telling you, this is pretty far from what I had in mind.” He pauses for a minute. “George?”

“Mm?”

“Wanted to tell you how sorry I am.”

Noyce props himself up on one straitjacketed elbow and stares at Laeddis in surprise. “You are? What for, Teddy?”

“For - forgetting you. And the rest. Sounds crazy but I know I did for a while there, didn’t I?”

“Ah, Teddy,” Noyce sighs, “don’t sweat it. Not like I’m a one to talk. Can’t keep ahold of half the stuff goes running through my head these days.”

Andrew traces his thumb along the line of Noyce’s brow, making him startle, and flinch. You’d never know what’s happened to him just from looking; the bruises from the lobotomy have long since faded and there aren’t even any obvious scars. Laeddis swallows hard before answering, but his voice still comes out a little choked. “Not as if you haven’t got good cause.”

Noyce huffs out in amusement again. “An’ you don’t?”

“I suppose,” Laeddis concedes. “Yeah, I suppose the two of us do make quite a pair. But I gotta tell you how sorry I am for it. Should’ve been looking out for you, and instead I went and cut you loose. I won’t let you down again, George, I swear.”

Noyce crooks a little smile but doesn’t reply.
“You believe me when I say that?”

“Sure, I believe you,” Noyce tells him mildly.

“Still, you will try and remember, won’t you?” Andrew insists, “that wherever they put you, or take me – whatever they try an’ tell you even, you got me now, for good. And if it gets rough – especially when it gets rough - you gotta keep a hold of that. Say you’ll remember me and try.”

“Okay, Teddy,” George says, “I will. If it makes you happy, I’ll try.”

“Yeah. Yeah. About that.” Laeddis begins. He doesn’t want to have to bring it up right now but one untimely slip-up and who knows what kind of trouble Noyce could land himself in? “The docs don’t want me going by Teddy anymore, you hear me? Have to use my real name, so you gotta remember an’ call me by the other – keep calling me ‘Andrew’ if they ever ask you about it, okay? But - it’s not like you don’t know that already. You’re clear enough ‘bout – who’s who an’ all now, aren’t you, George?”

“No problem, Teddy,” Noyce mutters, closing his eyes and relaxing against Laeddis’ shoulder again. “It’s OK. Think I got a pretty good idea exactly who you are.”

TBC

A/N (1a): Although the 42nd Infantry would be a much better fit for Laeddis as its soldiers were primarily from the Eastern seaboard states of the US - presumably Laeddis’ home turf, circumstantial evidence puts him in the US Army’s 45th Infantry Division during WW2. Rather than arriving in France during the Normandy Landings, as part of the 45th Infantry he would have been involved in the invasion of Sicily followed by an incursion onto the Italian mainland at Salerno in 1943, where the 5th US Army (which now incorporated the 45th Infantry Division) were joined by the British 8th Army, and proceeded towards Monte Cassino as the combined 15th Army Group. Plenty of opportunities for Laeddis to socialize with gay Englishmen there (see note 1b below).

Later in 1944 the 45th Infantry, now attached to the 7th US Army, landed at St Maxine in southern France. The troops advanced through France, reaching Germany in early 1945.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/45th_Infantry_Division_(United_States)

(1b) Private Dudley Cave was conscripted into the British army in 1941. For an account of his experiences as a gay serviceman during WW2, see

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/36/a2688636.shtml

Private Cave interestingly notes that a marked relaxation in homophobic attitudes occurred among the Military Command of the time. Oddly enough after the war, when the government was no longer in dire need of army recruits, engaging in same-sex relations went back to being a court-martial-able offence.
A/N(2): As I accurately noted back in Chapter 2, the technique of frontal lobotomy is quite literally a stab in the dark as its practitioners had no way of accurately assessing what parts of the recipients’ brains they had and hadn’t cut. “No two patients received the same operation” is one of the very many, completely justified criticisms of the procedure, and that there exist very few published studies recording the after-effects of lobotomy is partly a consequence of the technique itself not being quantifiable in the first place. There’s anecdotal evidence of course, much of it coming from Walter Freeman, who basically – and this is a gross oversimplification, that I’m implying from the fact that he personally performed upwards of 3500 lobotomies – ‘thought it worked great,’ and also a very few examples where the lobotomy recipients reported (and were left in a fit state after their lobotomy to be able to credibly report) a marked improvement in their symptoms following the operation. Tragically in the great majority of cases, lobotomies left their recipients with varying degrees of minor to moderate to debilitatingly severe forms of permanent psychological, and / or physical impairment.

It’s rare, but also isn’t absolutely unheard of, given the imprecise nature of the operation plus the fact that it was sometimes carried out by untrained, unpractised personnel, for a lobotomy to have little or no discernible effect on its recipient. This is probably one of the reasons why there are records of certain unfortunate people having been lobotomized twice.

So. ‘Minor impairment to NDE’ might not be historically accurate or statistically / medically probable but it is possible, so it’s the route I’ve chosen to go down in this story with George Noyce. He’s had bloody great needles stuck in his head so he’s still a right Mr Confused, if that’s any consolation.

If you don’t like this sort of wishy-washy narrative back-pedalling, you probably won’t want to read any further than this point because the story gets even more wildly implausible towards the end.
Of course Laeddis and Noyce can’t stay outside in the dark, in the snow forever and that guard’s going to wake up eventually, so they have to go back inside. If they’re both a little debauched and sticky in places in aftermath of their tryst, having been out in the cold’s an adequate enough cover for it and their return passes without comment. On the contrary, the guard expresses his gratitude to Laeddis for having recovered Noyce from the garden in so timely a fashion -

“Else this dummy would just’a stood there an’ stood there till he was frozen through.”

He escorts Laeddis back into Dr Cawley’s supervision and returns Noyce to the secure ward for the rest of the night.

**

Laeddis and Cawley have a better understanding of one another, now.

Andrew knows he hasn’t much to bargain with. But he kept his head down, and his eyes and ears open at the governors’ dinner and when he was there was able to garner some potentially useful pieces of information about his supervising psychiatrist.

Dr Cawley’s already esteemed and highly respected in his personal field of study. He’s well-regarded as a professional; that’s in absolutely no doubt. But from the gentle gossip and small-talk of Cawley’s compatriots Laeddis has learned that his doctor also secretly aspires to a much wider base of recognition and greater public acclaim.

In the interests of which he’s thinking of writing a book.

**

There isn’t time, so Laeddis broaches the subject of publishing rights head-on during his next patient session with the doctor.

“Won’t it be better for you to have my full co-operation?” he says.

Cawley eyes him thoughtfully. “Strictly speaking Andrew, I don’t need it.”

“Sure, you can go ahead and call me ‘Patient X’ or whatever, but that’s not gonna make for much of a story, is it?”

“Not necessarily. You still represent a fascinating and unique case.”

“But that’s not the reason you took me on in the first place,” Laeddis counters, “is it? I’m only one man. Now look what it took – how long it took - for you to fix me. Two years and counting. Armed guards all over, just so’s you can take me out the asylum then back again on a goddamn boat trip. Every damn person on this island under orders, roped in on your make-believe scam -”

The doctor frowns and spreads his hands. “Your point being...?”

“My point is you’ve gone to a lot of trouble over me, doc. A helluva lot. And like I said, I’m just one
man. What about Wild, or Noyce or even Eddie Blake? You want violent, crazy maniacs - seems to me you got a whole hospital to take your pick. So why’n’t you ever think about trying out your ‘cure’ on one of them?”

“It’s a completely different situation,” Cawley replies evenly. “As I’ve gotten to know you, Andrew, I’ve come to realize what a special kind of individual you are. You’re truly unique! Quite apart from which when we’re dealing with the fragile human psyche it would be naive to ever consider the situation as being a simple case of one-size-fits-all. Regarding the ‘cure’ as you call it, that I devised for you – specifically, particularly for you – it wouldn’t be expected to have a similar impact on anyone else.”

“Special,” Laeddis repeats. “Huh. Well I can't help what you think. But even if it's how you see me, ‘special’s’ not all I am though, is it Dr Cawley? That's not what got you so interested before you got to know me, way back at the start. The other docs say you pulled strings to have me brought here, and I know that’s only because - ” he hesitates. He’s not accustomed to thinking in these terms; has become so resistant to even the concept that he can barely bring himself to say it -

“Go on?”

“The reason is I’m famous.”

It’s true. The killings of Andrew’s wife and family were widely reported in the media, and later on Laeddis’ court case received a great deal of speculative coverage in the popular press. ‘The Lake House Murders’ - as they came to be known - caused a minor newspaper sensation at the time.

“Infamous, perhaps,” Cawley counters, giving him a thin smile. “Notorious, possibly. But that was more than two years ago, Andrew. Tomorrow’s fish-wrap. Isn’t that one of the more colourful terms for the daily news-sheets? Believe me, you’ll be long forgotten about.”

“Then there’s an angle for you, isn’t it – ‘where are they now’? In your book you can bring the story right up to date.”

Cawley thinks about that. It might not be the worst idea he’s ever heard. “You’ve always struck me as a very private person, Andrew,” he says. “May I ask what makes you want to co-operate?”

“I got my reasons,” Laeddis replies, looking him steadily in the eye.

The doctor groans. “You can’t be serious.”

**

Andrew hasn’t many cards to play. His personal endorsement of the project and permission to use his real name are enough to get George transferred out of the secure ward; Andrew’s first priority, given the poor condition he found him in last time. When he last saw Noyce he was in an unenviable state: cold and dirty and he’d lost a noticeable amount of weight - all from a frame that had little to spare to begin with. At the very least, under better supervision in the general unit there’ll be more chance of him getting enough to eat.

**

“So, we find ourselves returning to the unfortunate subject of George Noyce,” Dr Cawley sighs, “yet again. Really Andrew, that man’s been nothing but a thorn in my side. Completely unreliable right from the outset. I brought him in to spy on you of course, but he turned out to be no use whatever as an informant -” he eyes Laeddis shrewdly. “I don’t suppose there’s any chance that this is coming as news to you?”
“Ah, whatever, Doc,” Andrew replies blandly. “I’m sure you only did what you felt you had to. I don’t hold any grudges – against either of you for that.”

**

Next Laeddis gives Cawley authorisation to publish excerpts from his letters, and – even if he hesitates at first over this one – a selection of photographs of his family. In exchange he’s allowed to see George once a week - sometimes even twice, if the doc’s in an unusually magnanimous mood. Noyce is back on Ward A for the time being, but has been placed in one of the seclusion cells – ‘for safety’s sake,’ as Cawley enigmatically puts it.

“For safety's sake? What’s that supposed to mean?” Andrew wants to know.

Cawley stares at him. “Your friend’s a disturbed and violent habitual criminal, not to mention that in the past he’s repeatedly demonstrated a near-pathological antipathy directed specifically towards psychiatrists and other medical personnel. But, that said, it’s not the safety of our other patients or the hospital staff that’s necessitating this arrangement per se.”

That doesn’t answer anything. Laeddis waits for him to continue.

“Andrew, I’m aware we’ve yet to discuss this in any level of detail, but do you even remember what it was that led you to attack your so-called friend George Noyce?”

“Of course I do! He was trying to get me to listen - tell me the truth, but I was....confused –”

The doctor carries on, speaking over him, and paying little attention to what Laeddis is saying. “At the time I strongly advised against your meeting with him, and while I can’t condone your behaviour, I will say it’s understandable. Noyce can’t help himself. Deviant men – those unfortunates who share his particular...proclivities are well known to be deficient in moral fibre, frequently lacking any natural sense of common decency and unfortunately that kind of behaviour is only to be expected from a person of that type. But he attempted to involve you – to coerce you as a most unwilling participant into engaging in an act of the grossest possible indecency! Any normal man would quite naturally be repulsed – would have no recourse but to react precisely as you did.”

Laeddis gapes at him, open-mouthed. “You’re saying you put George in seclusion because you’re protecting him from me?"

“As matters currently stand, there was never any other justification for retaining him on C-Ward,” Cawley replies. “That arrangement was implemented primarily with a view to keeping the two of you separated. You may even truly believe you’ve forgiven him, but when matters of this nature are concerned, feelings inevitably run high. You should know, Andrew, that although my personal sympathies do of course lie with you, the safety of all my patients has to be taken into consideration and that includes George Noyce. I can’t afford to have you suddenly taking it into your head to turn on him again.”

Laeddis tries to protest and tell his doctor that what he thinks isn’t the way it really happened, but he can’t be persuaded. Cawley refuses to be budged from his oddly skewed world-view, and Andrew and Noyce’s relative places in it.

**

So, the weekly meetings go ahead but they’re all supervised, and as Noyce insists on playing dumb, he and Laeddis seldom have a chance to talk. Any closer contact is absolutely out of the question.

For all he’s still George underneath it all, it’s obvious to Andrew that some things have been taken
from Noyce. He might’ve retained his mental faculties - more or less, but his attention span and memory have been affected and at first he was prone to often forgetting, for example, that the hospital’s rigidly imposing a new no-touching rule. To avoid censure from the orderlies – or worse, complete cessation of their visits, Andrew has to remind himself to keep George at arm’s length in a very literal sense, and given their previous relationship, that’s difficult for both of them to take. The pathetic irony of their situation being that this time it isn’t really even about sex. What Laeddis finds he’s missing most at this point is the comfort and reassurance he once derived from simply being close to Noyce - and he can tell that George feels just the same.

If this is hard for Andrew to bear, it’s worse for him to see the effect his repeated rebuffs have had on Noyce.

George can’t always remember, so it falls to Laeddis to implement the hospital’s restrictions: reminding him to keep to his seat on the opposite side of the table, and refusing any and all forms of attempted contact.

His friend’s forgetful now, but George isn’t stupid and it’s clear he understands. He’s quite cognizant of Laeddis’ dilemma, and yet it’s impossible for him not to take all of Andrew’s knock-backs as some kind of personal rejection, because he’s still quite capable of feeling uncertain, mortified and hurt.

And in spite of what’s been done to him Noyce still blames himself for every one of his mistakes, so when he hangs his head and apologizes - for absolutely nothing, really - with a contrite “sorry, Teddy,” it makes Laeddis want to run about and rage. Not at Noyce, necessarily, but at the unfairness of their situation, and the people who’d want to take issue with something so innocuous as George forgetting for a moment when he sits too close, or tries to touch his former cell-mate’s hand.

Noyce is just as bad. He’s conscious of his impairment – given his frequent bouts of frustration and anger with himself, he’s all too clearly aware. He’s always been at pains to try to hide his feelings, but the procedure’s also stripped away a layer of his natural reserve. At times the faith and trust he puts in Laeddis are almost painful for him to witness and then on the next visit Noyce will be prickly and mistrustful, still smarting from Andrew-as-Teddy’s recent treatment of him and the after-effects of his ordeal.

Early on, under Laeddis’ friend Martyn’s less-than diligent watch, they have a rare opportunity for a proper conversation.

**

“You scared me,” Laeddis tells Noyce. “Those times I saw you before, how come you wouldn’t speak to me? Thought I’d lost you, Georgie.”

“Lost me?” Noyce repeats, giving Laeddis a small, bewildered smile. This is one of those days when he’s apt to take his meanings a bit too literally. “Nah, Teddy. What made you think you lost me? Didn’t you see I was standing right there?”

“Well yeah. Sure, I knew where you were when they brought you to see me, but all that time seemed like - in your head, you’d gone someplace else. I don’t blame you,” Andrew adds quickly, “after what they put you through. But you and me have seen what that operation does to people. That’s what I thought it’d done to you.”

“You sure it hasn’t?” Noyce says doubtfully.

Andrew shakes his head. “You’re OK George. Any fool can see that.” It’s not the whole truth, but
he’s not prepared to be brooking any argument whatever.

“S’what I’m afraid of,” George replies. “Said they were gonna fix me permanently, Teddy -” caught out by his mistake he stops and rubs his forehead, avoiding Laeddis’ eye –

-“Andrew, I mean, and for a while that’s just what they did. When I came round I couldn’t think straight – couldn’t even see right. I wasn’t pretending, Teddy - don’t think I could’ve spoke to you back then if I tried. But then my head started feeling funny an’ it sort of started coming back.”

Noyce ducks his head, chewing nervously at his fingernails till Andrew gestures for him to stop.

“And I was frightened,” he goes on indistinctly, “remembering what they said. Maybe that’s why I was so scared to talk. What they gonna do if they find out I’m not fixed all the way through? I couldn’t take a chance an’ say anything, don’t you see? And anyhow –“ he catches himself, breaking off again.

“Yeah?”

“Well,” Noyce hesitates. “I got this crazy idea you must be on their side.”

Rightly or wrongly, Laeddis’ feelings are hurt. He doesn’t see how Noyce could think that of him and tells him so.

“Not so long ago you were Agent Daniels,” Noyce retorts. “Treatin’ me like a suspect an’ trying to put the pressure on. Calling me names - sayin’ I’m a retard, all on account of your ‘investigation’. So you tell me. What was I supposed to think?”

Andrew subsides. “I know you’re not retarded, George.”

Noyce snorts, exasperated. “Yeah? Come to think of it, I guess that must’ve been the other fella. Your pal, ‘Doctor Chuck.’ ‘Cause you’re so sure you ‘know people’ don’t you, Andrew? Leastways, you seemed pretty sure of yourself at the time. ‘Bout the last thing I do remember before they put me under is you telling me an’ telling me how you’d trust that lying, two-faced sonofabitch with your life - “

“That’s not fair,” Laeddis mutters. “That lying, two-faced sonofabitch is a professional, like they all are. They knew exactly how to get to me, okay? Those doctors pulled the wool over my eyes, too.”

“Well, maybe that’s the story and maybe they done a number on all of us,” Noyce concludes, “but you’ll excuse me for being suspicious, ‘cause I’m in for the long haul, not like you. You won’t be here forever. Gotta watch out for myself now, Teddy. That’s not your job to do.”

**

George is right about Laeddis’ imminent discharge from the hospital. Steady steps are being taken with a view towards his rehabilitation, and a date late in April has been set for his release.

The idea of it – of being permanently separated from George – is unthinkable to Laeddis, in spite of Cawley’s assurances that his friend will be well cared for during the remainder of his stay.

“Remainder of his stay?” Andrew asks. “Does that mean he’ll getting out some day?” But the doctor, looking inscrutable, won’t give him a reply.

The fact is that Noyce has seen too much; knows too much and that means that even taking into account his apparently incapacitated state, he’s never going to be allowed to leave Shutter Island.
He’s one of Ashecliffe’s lifers, now and in George’s case that’s really going to mean: for the rest of his life. And outsiders, of course, don’t get to come on visits.

**

A number of sundry recollections from Laeddis’ war years, plus a few anecdotes from his early life for Dr Cawley’s book get Andrew permission to have Noyce accompany him to the dock on the day of his release. It isn’t much. The prison guards are jumpy and the atmosphere is tense: they seem convinced that Laeddis is going to try and pull an insane, last-minute, desperate escape.

He isn’t. He says a stilted goodbye to Noyce, the two of them still so strictly supervised that there’s no opportunity even for a final, friendly embrace. He’s barely allowed to shake George’s hand, but at the last minute he puts his head to Noyce’s ear and whispers to him, telling him -

“It’s gonna be okay.” And Laeddis means it. He doesn’t know how he’s going to do it, but he intends to get Noyce out of hospital and off the island; swears that somehow, he’s going to come up with a plan.

TBC

A/N: As mentioned in the author’s foreword, I’m no kind of expert on mental illness, apart from maybe having seen films like ‘Girl, Interrupted’ and ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,’ but as this hardly counts as specialist knowledge, if you’ve managed to stick with the story this far it probably goes without saying that you’re already taking the various goings-on with a fairly hefty pinch of salt. The prospect of Andrew being released from Ashecliffe Hospital at this point does seem so glaringly unlikely however that it’s something even I feel I have to address, but actually, as indicated in the online excerpts from:


That I read here:

Astonishingly, it turns out not to be quite as far-fetched as I was expecting.

The 1950s saw the start of new treatment philosophies for mental patients, with a (now-controversial) move towards deinstitutionalization, together with short-term / outpatient and community based treatments being advocated. There was also a short-lived shift in attitude in the American judicial system towards a ‘medical model’ for crime, the underpinning idea of which is that criminal behaviour is caused by biological problems that can be diagnosed and treated in the same way that medical doctors treat disease. Similarly in relation to mentally ill people, the expectation was that
they, too, could be ‘cured:’ just as post-war advances in medical research had led to new antibiotics and vaccines, it was thought that development of new psychiatric drugs would bring an end to mental illnesses. This expectation was supported to a limited extent by the widespread deployment around this time of psychiatric drugs such as Chlorpromazine (marketed as Thorazine in the US) that worked to suppress, if not cure many of the symptoms of psychosis.

According to Menininger & Nemiah (eds., 2008), pp521-523: ‘This psychiatric view of criminology had its greatest impact on the criminal justice system in the 1950s (& 1960s)...(and) is one instance in which psychiatrists exerted a powerful influence on the legal system.’ ‘In this decade commitment to indeterminate sentencing, based on a medical model, reached its peak....parole boards were given much latitude in deciding when offenders could be released and psychiatric reports were often given considerable weight in making release decisions.’

Several states also developed treatment programmes for ‘special offenders’, including individuals identified as ‘defective delinquents’ – criminals whose activities were thought to be due to a mental abnormality. These programmes were managed by psychiatrists and incorporated similar principles of psychiatric treatment and indeterminate confinement.

All this means that at approximately the time ‘Shutter Island’ is set, psychiatrists had a relatively prominent role in the management and treatment of criminal offenders, with psychiatric assessment being an important part of the parole process. From this I’m stretching a point for the purposes of the story here to infer that Dr Cawley would have had carte blanche to deal with Laeddis however he liked, which means having him released from hospital and back onto the streets of Boston because he believed so strongly in his ‘cure.’
Andrew might have just one aim in mind, but months have passed since his release, and he’s still no closer to realizing his goal.

Since leaving Ashecliffe Hospital he’s been living at a half-way house in South End, in a hostel that provides accommodation for a number of people like Laeddis – which is to say, vulnerable adults – at various stages of their reintegration back into the general community.

During the day Laeddis is free to come and go in theory. Unlike some of his contemporaries at the half-way house however, he’s been placed under the semi-custodial care of the proprietor of the facility, in an arrangement that given Laeddis’ background, seems set to continue indefinitely.

His release from Ashecliffe Hospital has always been a probationary arrangement. The hospital governors have engaged a local psychotherapist on Laeddis’ behalf and his new doctor, in communication with the Dr Cawley, continues to monitor Laeddis’ rehabilitation during the twice-weekly counselling sessions that he’s obliged to attend. Should Andrew start skipping therapy meetings, or fail to sign in at his lodgings for his evening curfew, his parole will be placed under immediate review with the very likely outcome that he’ll be returned on a one-way ticket to Shutter Island.

And Andrew’s thought about taking up that ticket. He’s finding his new situation so difficult he’s even given serious thought to going ahead with that half-baked, half-assed plan.

But in the long run, being back at Ashecliffe wouldn’t do much for either of them, would it?

**

Laeddis’ doctors at the hospital were quick to appreciate quite early on that one of the troubles that has plagued him – or at least, one trouble of many – is a tendency he has for over-analysis. Andrew’s nagging doubts and queries have already contributed to – one might even say actively bolstered - a number of his flights from reality previous.

So, with a view to avoiding a recurrence of his...troublesome fretting, he’s been assigned a job to keep him occupied - arranged, again, by his sponsors from the hospital. The hours are Monday to Friday, with time allotted for Laeddis’ therapy sessions and Sunday and alternate Saturdays off. It’s not quite regular employment – even though it is paid work, because the bulk of his wages get sent direct to Mr Myerson, who runs the hostel Laeddis is living in. Myerson deducts an unspecified sum in part-payment for Laeddis’ board and lodging and allocates the remainder to Laeddis as pocket-money. This tends to be a fairly trivial amount, the varying total of which seems to depend on what mood Mr Myerson is in at the time.

Not that Laeddis, ordinarily, would be finding much to spend his earnings on. Nine-to-five and with a half hour each way for his commute across Boston on foot, and Andrew’s time is not his own.

Evenings though, are another story. When he’s alone in his bedsit, in his room with its dingy slanted ceiling, up under the eaves on the fourth floor: in the evenings he might as well be back at Ashcliffe again as there are long hours to spare and Laeddis, who’s not allowed out of the hostel past seven o’clock because the bars are open, has little idea of what he should do with himself.

Yes, he’s living in the real world again – is paying his way: can once more count himself, certainly in
one narrow economic sense, as a useful participant in normal society. But Andrew’s at his wit’s end, all to clearly aware that he isn’t coping with life outside of mental hospital. And the problem isn’t even that he’s not capable of making an independent life for himself - because he’s self-sufficient, to a greater or lesser extent. It’s more of an ingrained habit he’s developed. Almost like he’s seeing ghosts -

Not ‘ghosts’ in the same way that he used to see - and hear and hold conversations with - imaginary visions of Dolores, obviously; a prerequisite of Andrew’s release from Ashecliffe being his demonstrated ability to differentiate between what is real and what’s not -

But sometimes – sometimes of an evening, something that caught Andrew’s attention, or that he saw, or someone said that day at work (or more often, during his walk to and from it) will occur to Laeddis. He might as well be at Ashecliffe so without thinking he’ll find himself turning round on his bunk to tell George about it - and every time feels just a slight and fresh wrench in his gut when he sees that something is missing and remembers (of course) that Noyce isn’t there.

Not that that stops Andrew from doing it.

And this is what he’s finding so difficult: the problem he’s unable to come to terms with. He can’t stand not being able to do anything to help because he’s set on saving Noyce - needs Noyce to be out of the hospital and back where in Laeddis’ opinion he belongs: by Laeddis’ side. But he’s tried, and can’t do it. So he plots, and plots away and frets. Finds it difficult to concentrate. Lies awake nights. Barely sleeps.

Andrew is maybe getting a little bit obsessed. He refuses to give up, but sometimes is beginning to wonder if it wasn’t Noyce of all people, confused and monumentally messed-up Noyce, who saw their situation most clearly after all.

**

On a cold day in spring and past the winter, but sometime near the end, it’s one of the few occasions back at the hospital when they have a proper chance to talk together, partly because it’s one of George’s ‘good’ days but mainly on account of Laeddis’ orderly pal Martyn having drawn chaperone duty, and he really doesn’t give a damn.

So Laeddis has been sitting there, telling George in a low voice about - he doesn't remember exactly what. But from the way Noyce huffs and rolls his eyes before he interrupts him, he knows it must have been the usual subject - how Noyce mustn't worry because Laeddis is making it his mission to get Noyce out.

“I got something to say to you,” George announces, hunching forward in his seat across the table that separates him from Laeddis, “an’ we ain’t got time so you better listen, ’cause of the way you’ve been talking, and I’ve seen what you’re like when you get one a’ these – ideas of yours stuck in your head.”

“You gotta let it go,” he tells him seriously, “’cause if you don’t, I’m honest-to-god scared what’ll happen to you.”

Laeddis replies that he’s no idea what Noyce is on about.

“You know full well what I’m talking about,” Noyce snaps. “Me. This place. All –this. You’re gonna haveta forget about it, okay? Just say goodbye an’ let it go.”

Andrew tilts his head and squints at him. “You saying I should try an’ forget you Georgie, like how I
did last time? You telling me you really want that?"

“Course I don’t!” Noyce leans forward in his seat again, his voice intense. “But I’m never gettin’ out of here. There’s nothing you can do’s gonna change that. So you gotta – gotta face facts! Face reality sometime, an’” - he shifts uncomfortably, avoiding Laeddis’ eye - “we both know how much trouble you got doing that. You ain’t going to last long outside if you’re all the time thinking about here an’ looking back. That’s why it’s better you try an’ put what happened – between you and me - behind you. They’re giving you a second chance, Andrew, and that’s not something everyone gets handed to them on a plate.”

“So what do you want me to do?” Andrew asks him, because he really wants to know how George is going to reply.

“Go out an’ live a proper life and be happy,” Noyce answers straight back.

**

A proper life! As if he’s ever going to have much chance of that.

In the meantime, Laeddis can’t secure formal legal advice. As his current finances stand, he has only three dollars and twenty-seven cents to his name and can’t possibly pay for a lawyer. With only three dollars twenty to his name he wasn’t even managing to eat lunch every day. That is, until his employer -

A slight recap. Andrew’s employer is a Mrs Lettice Dunlop, a well-known patron of the arts as well as various worthy causes about the city. The husband of one of her grown-up daughters - he’s a medical doctor – sits on the board of Ashecliffe Hospital’s governing committee, and was instrumental in setting up a job for Laeddis following his release.

That this guy arranged a post for Laeddis, a convicted wife-murderer with a history of violence and mental instability not only inside the home - but also working at times closely alongside of his elderly female relative - has to make Andrew wonder about the nature of the relationship between the doctor and Laeddis’ employer. But as he soon finds out, hiring Laeddis wasn’t originally even the doctor son-in-law’s idea.

Mrs Dunlop’s a grandmotherly, fluttery lady, with an impeccable New England pedigree. Utterly respectable - and with a definite blood-thirsty streak.

She’s an avid follower of all sorts of bad news in the daily papers: recounts tales of murder and arson and kidnappings –pores over the histories of the victims and perpetrators that she reads about, relating their the woes and misfortunes to anyone who’ll listen as ongoing anecdotes, counting this real-life material far more thrilling than anything she’d encounter in the pages of a book.

Mrs Dunlop started following Laeddis’ own wretched story three years ago, and has never quite forgotten about him since. And when she heard that he was due to be released -!

That fluttery exterior of hers also acts as useful camouflage for a deep-seated head-strong streak. Once Mrs Dunlop gets hold of an idea she sticks to it, and though she didn’t actually have to move mountains in her bid to help Laeddis (by employing him), there was still a whole raft of severe - and actually wholly valid – practical objections to be overcome. But Lettice chooses her battles carefully: having made up her mind to secure Laeddis’ services, she would neither listen to reason nor be persuaded from her course - and so the capitulation of the well-meaning opponents in her family was only ever going to be a matter of time.
So, Andrew goes to work at the Dunlop residence, which is a pleasantly block-shaped, red-brick townhouse, up on the outskirts of Beacon Hill. From the outside the house, with its little widow’s walk, is deceptively modest-looking, set back slightly from the street and discreetly screened from it by a row of leafy elms.

Inside, however, it’s getting on towards being a chamber of the bizarre.

Mrs Dunlop comes from a family of coffee-planters, the senior members of whom were in the habit of travelling widely through Africa, the Orient and the East, collecting local curios and examples of indigenous artwork as they went. Their purchases were lovingly boxed up, labelled, sent home and forgotten about, with the result that fifty years’ worth of tribal artefacts from across three continents now form a haphazard collection that fills most of the top two floors of the Beacon Hill house.

Unpacking, cataloguing and identifying the provenance of this extraordinarily diverse accumulation of objects is Laeddis’ job. There’s more than fifty years worth of overseas correspondence to be gone through - and meticulously cross-referenced wherever possible - too. It’s monotonous, archivist’s work by and large, even if some of the items Laeddis has to handle in the course of his duties - the Hill-tribe shrunken heads and Congolese nail-fetishes, for example - make him feel a little ill.

Any particularly rare or choice items are go into display cases, in regular rotation, on the lower floors.

And possibly Laeddis sometimes feels like he’s another one of the exhibits, and sometimes he thinks that maybe Mrs Dunlop in her own way is an especially particular and exclusive type of collector, too. But he’s still grateful to her – and not just for giving him a job.

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It’s about a month after his release from the hospital and Andrew hasn’t spoken to anyone, apart from his therapist, for almost three weeks. He doesn’t seek out company and even his compatriots at the hostel avoid him because he looks driven, and they find him frighteningly intense.

The truth is that Laeddis is pining. He spends every minute when he’s not on curfew or at his job studying, down in the legal section of Boston Public Library. He’s always and only thinking about Noyce. Trying to find some kind of little-known clause, an impossible loophole that’ll let –

But so far, he’s coming up with nothing.

Myerson, Laeddis’ landlord, is no help. He’s taken to skimming off more and more of Laeddis’ pay-packet. Andrew barely notices; could care even less if he did. If he sees there isn’t enough money he remedies that by not spending any. He’s taken to skipping meals and often forgets he has to eat.

Of course Laeddis’ Boston psychotherapist should be well-placed to see that something is amiss. In many ways the man is a credit to his profession: decent, knowledgeable and competent, but as a protégée of Dr Cawley’s, he’s still young enough to be caught up in a student / mentor relationship and regards his former tutor with an excess of deference and awe. He isn’t inexperienced, but as the particular behavioural markers Cawley’s warned him to watch for don’t appear to be in evidence, Laeddis’ condition doesn’t unduly raise his concern. As far as he can tell his patient just appears to be a little bit depressed.

“Do you have something on your mind, Andrew?” he asks him. “Something you’d like to talk about, perhaps?

“I was - seeing someone,” Laeddis tells him, because he knows there’s no point in lying. “Things
didn’t work out so well and yeah, I’ve been kinda cut-up about it.”

“Girl trouble, huh?” the therapist says suavely, much gratified by this apparently frank and open response. “Isn’t there any chance of the two of you getting back together again?”

“I hoped so, but that’s looking less and less likely, doc,” Laeddis mutters.

“Ah, well! Plenty more fish in the sea!” Laeddis’ therapist replies. He’s so relieved that Andrew’s problem’s turned out to be something this mundane that in the moment doesn’t register the brittle smile that Laeddis gives him, or the desperate, anxious look in his eyes.

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In the end it’s Laeddis’ employer, Mrs Dunlop, who’s the one who notices.

The troubled young man who’s come to work for her bears little resemblance to the dangerous ex-criminal she’s been told to expect. At first impression Laeddis appears if anything, to be disappointingly normal, in fact.

He’s perfectly civil and answers questions if he’s asked them directly but isn’t forthcoming and otherwise, rarely speaks. Lettice’s household staff report that he’s punctual and works diligently, often through his lunch-break, and that in his dealings with all members of the Dunlop household, he’s unfailingly courteous and correct.

Lettice, however, is the mother of five children, all of whom have...challenging, artistic temperaments, and that, together with her charitable connections to the city’s opera house and ballet has given her an eye for spotting high-strung hysterics. Returning from a fortnight’s visit with her other daughter she’s immediately struck by how drawn and shaky-looking Laeddis is getting, and by his permanently preoccupied air. It soon becomes clear to her that even as he’s carrying out his duties – with listless, dull efficiency - her new employee’s mind is absolutely always on something else. On top of which the poor fellow’s gotten positively gaunt.

That, at least, is something Mrs Dunlop feels she’s able to remedy. Every morning since then when Laeddis arrives for work, he’s found a vacuum flask of coffee, another of soup, and a cloth-covered plate of sandwiches set out on a side table in his office. Every day she’s at home, Lettice comes and sits and talks non-stop at him, until Laeddis relents enough to eat some of it.

Later in the day the Dunlop housekeeper or some other member the household will come in and replenish the flasks and plates. None of them want Laeddis’ thanks and if he finds it a little galling, to be reduced to being a charity-case, he’s grateful for his employer’s kindness, if it comes to that.

And this could have been the end of Laeddis’ story. There’s a lifetime of archive work for him at the Dunlop place, and he could’ve gone on well into his twilight years chipping away at it, until he was old and grey.

Or until, missing Noyce terribly, maybe he went one night and deliberately stepped out under a bus.

TBC
Neither of those things do happen however.

Laeddis doesn’t accidentally-on-purpose kill himself, and he doesn’t spend the rest of his life working for Mrs Dunlop either because at the end of summer he winds up being introduced to one of Lettice’s society friends, a wealthy industrialist’s widow called Freddie Warren, who, in the days before she was married, went by the name of Miss Winifred Noyce.

Freddie’s what used to be known as a progressive, and even now some of her charitable interests still run toward dangerously liberal themes. On the day Andrew meets her she’s speaking at a fundraiser for the American Civil Liberties Union, trying to promote interest in the unfashionable and generally neglected topic of prison reform.

There turn out to be highly personal reasons for her support of this particular subject.

Mrs Warren’s a tall and thin and striking-looking woman of around, or perhaps a handful few years more than Andrew’s own age. She has high cheekbones and a shortly-styled hair cut that accentuates them, and on the day Laeddis meets her is impeccably turned-out in an outfit consisting of a man’s waistcoat, silk dress shirt and a pair of trousers from a hounds-tooth business suit, that if they weren’t originally made to measure, have all been flawlessly altered to fit.

In her talk Freddie goes much further than some of her contemporaries, arguing for a complete overhaul of the prison system. She speaks in favour of a rehabilitative approach based on the Howard League’s model, which, she says, is already in use in England, and incorporates the widespread implementation of prisoner-education programmes. Rather than engaging their attention, much of the substance of her talk seems to pass her lackadaisical audience by - but she gives a rousing, heartfelt speech.

“Bit of a dismal turn-out,” she says afterwards, looking dispassionately round the near-deserted church hall. “Not much chance of us breaking even once we’ve paid for hiring this place, I shouldn’t think.” Her face brightens and she says - “oh well! I can always pay for any shortfall!”

Initially Laeddis assumed that he’d been invited to this fundraiser for the sole - if embarrassingly obvious reason - that he’s the only person that Lettice knows who’s actually been to prison. In the event it appears to have been more of a making-up-the-numbers situation, as today’s meeting seems to have been painfully under-attended.

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“Dear me!” Mrs Dunlop exclaims unhappily as they arrive, because it’s obvious even to Andrew that the gathering as a whole has a downmarket, definitely shifty air. The small number of other attendees are grouped in ones and twos together, each little knot of people standing as far away as possible from the others and doing their best to avoid one another’s eye.

“One doesn’t like to say ‘un-American’-! And even bearing in mind that the Warrens are very old friends of my family, I wouldn’t usually -” Lettice breaks off, sighing, then seems to rally. “But – united front, as they say! And as you know Freddie attended the same school as my younger
daughter. One of the scholarship students. Never....actually graduated - but she’s very, very bright. As it happens we weren’t acquainted with her family at the time. Didn’t even get to know Freddie until quite a while after she married Robert, in fact. Well! We wouldn’t would we? Because of course you won’t have forgotten how much it was remarked upon at the time that their honeymoon went on, and on, for almost two years! But she was young and so lovely, and he’d all-but retired by then – so why shouldn’t they go and see a bit of the world? That’s what we said, anyway. It means we never met the famous brother, of course.”

All of the people in Lettice’s social circle are intimately acquainted - and know a fair bit about each other’s personal business, too. That Andrew isn’t one of them is a fact that - when she’s talking to him, often seems to slip Lettice’s mind. Still, he’s happy enough to sit and listen to her, and by now has become accustomed to hearing long and in-depth stories about people he doesn’t know and is never likely to meet.

“Mmm,” he comments politely.

“But we had heard of them. And the poor young man’s....troubles...caused quite a scandal at the time. If you remember he was arrested, caught canoodling on the beach in broad daylight with another Freshman from his class.”

Something familiar about this piques Laeddis’ interest. “Where was this now?”

“I believe it was out at Cape Ann – you know, ‘the other Cape’? The boys tried to claim there’d been a terrible mistake. ‘Only gone there for nature study,’ they said.” Lettice clucks her tongue in sympathy. “Just goes to show there’s such a difference between college smart and worldly wise, doesn’t it? I mean, really! Saying you wanted to go bird-watching in twenty-degree weather, when there’s six inches of snow!”

Andrew sits and thinks about that.

“From there on in,” Lettice continues when he doesn’t reply, “it was just a downward spiral into disaster! Freddie’s brother was released with a caution - being he first time he’d been in trouble and all, and his parents – of course I never knew them but they were very respectable people by all accounts – tried everything they could. But by then it was too late. He’d already been seduced by the lure of ‘that kind’ of life.” She stares at Laeddis, wide-eyed. “You know, they say it goes on far more often than we can tell.”

“Is that so? ” Laeddis replies. “Do you happen to know what happened next?”

“Peter, the college classmate did very well. Put the whole unfortunate business behind him and graduated with honours three years later. He married, shortly after. My son knows him slightly. Keen golfer. Works in banking.”

Andrew has to bite his tongue to get a grip of himself. “What happened to Mrs Warren’s brother, I mean.”

Lettice looks discomfited. “That's not such a happy story. After a string of arrests, he was eventually convicted of attempted murder. Of the doctor who tried so hard to help him, if you can believe that! Freddie dropped out of school – some ruction or other with her family, I’m not sure of the details - but the upshot is she ran away and married Robert, or at least...that’s what she did eventually. As for the brother he died in prison, two years later. Naturally, that’s the reason that these days, Freddie takes such a keen interest in -”

“He died?”
“Suicide,” Mrs Dunlop says, mouthing the word out silently.

“And - what did you say was Mrs Warren’s name before she was married?” Andrew asks urgently. “When she was at school with your daughter like you said?”

Lettice tells him.

By now he’s expecting her answer, but the shock of hearing it said still makes Laeddis’ vision white out for a moment. “And, uh, the brother’s name,” he says, when he can trust himself to speak. “I’m right in thinking that’d be George, wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, so you do know them!” Mrs Dunlop exclaims interestedly, “I mean at some point you met the Noyces, too?”

“Maybe one of them,” Andrew says faintly, “I think so. Yeah.”

“Well then, you must come and say hello to Freddie!” Lettice beams, which is fortunate, because it’s exactly what Andrew already has in mind.

As a friend of the talkative Lettice Dunlop, it turns out that Mrs Warren has heard more than a little of Laeddis’ history, and has been told to expect that he’ll be accompanying her to the meeting. When it’s finished, after the few legitimate attendees have gone on their way, she comes over for a chat.

She stands there smiling as Lettice introduces them, looking Laeddis up and down.

At this point Andrew finds his thoughts drawn, irresistibly, to his representative from the family Noyce; George standing small, overlooked and neglected, left permanently bewildered in hospital and struggling to string a coherent sentence together. And in many ways he’s this nice-looking, fine-mannered lady’s opposite, because she’s suave, well-groomed and articulate - so confident, secure and insulated by her position and prosperity that for a moment Laeddis thinks he may well hate Freddie, just a little bit. “I’m a friend of your brother, George,” he tells her.

At first mention of Noyce’s name, the faintly amused expression that Freddie’s been wearing vanishes and her face closes down completely.

“I’m sad to say – very sad to say that that’s impossible,” she says frostily. “Quite impossible you see, because it’s common knowledge my brother’s been dead for almost thirty years.”

“Oh yeah? Because I’m pretty sure I know your brother George from Dedham prison. And from Ashecliffe Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where he’s been a patient on and off, for the past however many years,” Andrew insists. “That’s where he is now, as a matter of fact.”

“You’re mistaken,” Freddie replies. “George passed away in the summer of 1928. I remember it quite clearly. It happened just two days before I turned fifteen.”

Laeddis juts his jaw at her. “I guess that must’ve put a real dampener on the celebrations, huh?”

“You’d do well to show a little respect! Unable to cope with the intolerable conditions he found in prison, poor George had no recourse but to take his own life!”

And Andrew can see why she might want to say that. She’s a high-class lady, and spinning a sad story about a deceased relative doesn’t just bring in the sympathy vote: if she wanted to marry well it must have been her only socially-acceptable option. Writing George off as a suicide might be a bare-faced lie - but it certainly must have been convenient. p>
Now Laeddis has no doubts at all. He does hate her for it.

“You and me both know that’s bullshit,” he retorts, and his rude comment draws an actual cry of dismay from Mrs Dunlop. “Your brother’s alive and – an’ more-or-less well right this minute. And another thing - I gotta tell you, it’s double bullshit you going round saying how ‘he couldn’t cope’ or whatever because he’s one of the toughest, bravest guys I know.”

“Mr Laeddis,” Freddie says, with a furious edge in her voice, “I’m willing to make allowances for you not only because you’re a guest of Lettice’s, here, but because - whether you choose to believe it or not – I’m aware of, and remain sympathetic towards your deeply unfortunate personal situation. But this conversation is over. Speak to me in public, or try to contact me any further on this matter and I guarantee you’ll face legal redress. I absolutely refuse to have my family, or my brother’s good name dragged through the gutter. That’s not going to happen again. You’d better take this as my first, and last, warning.”

She bids a curt farewell to Lettice, turns her back on Laeddis and starts walking away.

“So, you got plans to sue me if I try talking to you again?” Andrew yells after her, sounding off now like a total whack-job and all too aware of it. “Well, Mrs Warren, that’s funny or maybe it runs in the family or something, because when he went home that one time? Way I hear it, that’s just what your and George’s father said.”

There’s a hitch to her stride as Freddie seems to hesitate for a moment on her way to the exit - but perhaps she’s just missed her step because she catches herself immediately and carries on.

After she’s gone Laeddis subsides, white-faced and shaking. If he thought he was looking for an ally to help spring George from prison, that literally could not have gone any worse.

Poor Mrs Dunlop, meanwhile, has been in an absolute agony of social anxiousness and dismay and come to think of it, she’s looking a little pale and shaky too.

“Andrew!” she gasps, absolutely mortified. “How could you!”

She’s not the type of person who would ever remonstrate with a companion or even a hireling in public but she’s as upset as Laeddis has ever seen her, and he feels a pang of guilt at having caused the kind old lady such distress.

“I’m sorry,” Andrew tells her, offering his arm and letting her lean on him. “Honest, Mrs D., I don’t know if your friend’s lying or what she’s thinking, but you gotta help me try an’ talk to her again.”

“Talk to her again?” Lettice exclaims in dismay. “Andrew! Why would you want to? Didn’t you hear what Freddie said?”

“Because I’m sure I know her brother, and she’s got this thing all wrong.”

Laeddis’ employer just stares at him, making Andrew wonders if he mightn’t be seeing George again and sooner than he thinks, because the way Lettice is looking at him is a lot like she wondering whether he’s gone and lost his wits.

TBC
A/N: It's not without slight reservations that I've posted these pages of exposition - including the ridiculous, whopping great Mills & Boon-style deus ex machina: not much excuse, but the way the whole Ashecliffe Hospital / Shutter Island situation’s been set up, you do need a bit of something on the scale of actual divine intervention to get anyone away from there.
Another talk with Freddie

Mrs Dunlop makes the most reluctant of recruits to Laeddis’ cause and in the days that follow flat-out refuses outright to speak to him on the subject. So he’s astonished when, about a week after the prison reform talk, he turns up for work and is told that that Mrs Dunlop has a visitor, Mrs Warren, who would like to speak to him.

Freddie and Lettice are already waiting for him in Lettice’s downstairs drawing room

“Mr Laeddis, I was struck by something you said to me the day we met,” Freddie tells him briskly. “But we’ll need to check our facts - make sure we’re not getting our wires crossed! Perhaps you could start by telling me a little about this George Noyce you say you met in prison.”

Andrew regards her warily. “I’m not sure I understand what you’re asking me,” he replies.

“I’ll go first then, shall I?” Mrs Warren offers.

Freddie focuses her gaze on a point somewhere in the distance behind Laeddis’ right shoulder. His heart sinks the minute she starts speaking.

“My brother George was a big, strapping fellow,” Freddie begins, without preamble. “He was an athlete – a star when he was at college. Terribly good-looking too. Handsome, I dare say even, and couldn’t help himself – exuded charm and confidence, so much so that people would be drawn to him. When I was young I simply idolized him. Any little sister would.”

Laeddis stands up from his seat abruptly, muttering curt apologies to Lettice and Mrs Warren. “I’m sorry,” he tells them, “looks like I’ve been wasting you two ladies’ time, because the George Noyce I got in mind’s kinda – the opposite of everything you just said. He’s sort-of – shrimpy-looking. Quiet. Doesn’t like to draw attention to himself, so you – I mean someone like you prob’ly wouldn’t even notice he’s there.”

Freddie’s staring at him with a strange, puzzled expression as if she doesn’t understand - or maybe is wondering what on earth he’s talking about, and that irks Laeddis – really gets his back up, to think she seems unable to comprehend why a character like Laeddis is describing would be worth putting in the time and effort it would take to save.

“The guy I’m talking about,” Andrew continues sincerely, thinking he might as well go ahead and make a little speech since he’s having to justify himself, “well, he might not look as if he’s got much going for him. But you got no idea some of the stuff they put him through in that place we were in and he’s come out the other end of that – okay, more or less, like I said, ‘cause he’s tough, like you wouldn’t believe. And the funny thing is he wouldn’t stand to hear me talking him up to you like this either, ‘cause he doesn’t think much of himself. Matter a’ fact it used to make me mad, the way he’s so down on himself all the time.”

After he’s said his piece, Andrew steps abruptly away from the two women, doing his best to hide his disappointment. Something else occurs to him then and he turns back to deliver one last parting shot. “And, oh yeah - he told me that him an’ his sister? When she was small they used to fight like cat and dog. Seems pretty obvious we’ve been sitting here talking at cross purposes - comparing notes about the wrong guy.”
“My brother always was overly hard on himself,” says Freddie calmly. “Even when I was young I always thought so, too. So it’s true that oftentimes we fought. George’s attitudes were shaped by those of my father of course, and Daddy was at best – well! A difficult man, I think it suffices to say. Whilst I have to believe that he thought he was doing the best for his son, even then, he was never the most liberal or understanding of role-models. The point is I’ve already checked the particulars of your story Mr Laeddis, and I’ve no doubt that what you’ve told me about George being alive and well and a current inmate of Ashecliffe hospital is true.”

Laeddis stares at her. “So what’s with you going on about ‘my brother, the college athlete’ and all that nonsense?”

“You see Mr Laeddis,” Freddie says, “the problem I have is that I’m not entirely certain what to make of you. It seems a tad convenient, doesn’t it? Your suddenly turning up out of the blue at this point.”

“Not really,” Andrew replies. “I got no reason to lie to you.”

Freddie’s big enough to acknowledge that. “But, with hindsight, you have to bear in mind that it never once crossed my mind that my own parents would turn out to be a pair of bare-faced liars,” she explains bluntly. “Lying to themselves, their friends and family – lying to everybody really, and the sad thing is now I think back I can believe it of them all too easily. What I can’t understand is why George never wrote. Never once attempted to make contact over all these years.”

“That’s probably on account of your father warning him off for being a bad influence.”

“A bad influence!” Freddie replies, “I can well imagine how easy it would be for my brother to be persuaded of that. I heard them from my window, you know. That night he came home in the summer. My parents and I quarrelled bitterly over it afterwards. Of course they absolutely refused to talk about - to even acknowledge - what happened. I don’t think the matter was ever mentioned between them again and I’m quite certain I’ve never knowingly spoken of it. Which made me wonder, Mr Laeddis, when you called after me so angrily the other day. But as I say, I’ve resolved to take things less at face-value, in future.”

“Starting with me,” Andrew says.

Freddie beams back at him. “I suppose the timing’s regrettable from your perspective,” she tells him, “but, yes.”

Laeddis just glowers at her. “You don’t know me, Mrs Warren,” he says, “so I better tell you I don’t like when people try to trick me.”

“And neither do I!” Freddie exclaims. “You have to understand that there’s a headstone. George’s burial plot – it’s in a very fancy uptown cemetery - is marked with a headstone and I go, and I leave flowers every month. I’ve been putting flowers on my brother’s grave for the past twenty-eight years and it turns out all this time he’s been -” she breaks off and stares out of the window for a moment, breathing hard and trembling.

Throughout all of this Lettice has been watching Mrs Warren and Laeddis’ back-and-forth with rapt attention. “Not...in there?” she now ventures, following a long, uncomfortable pause.

“Locked away!” Freddie cries vehemently, jumping forward in her seat and slapping both hands flat onto the table in front of her, looking fierce.

This is the first time since meeting her that Andrew’s been able to see a definite family resemblance.
“My parents appeared to genuinely grieve for him. I suppose they were grieving for him in a way. We all grieved for him! Oh yes, it was a difficult time and so on, but I simply can’t countenance my having been so foolish!”

“You feel you acted foolishly?” Lettice exclaims. “How can you think so?”

“Because I blindly accepted the false scenario with which I was presented and wasted time mourning my brother like a cow-eyed fool when my efforts could have been much more usefully directed!”

“You think you should’ve checked up on your folks’ story, or something?”

“Knowing my parents as I do now, Mr Laeddis,” Freddie tells him, “that’s exactly what I should’ve been doing!”

“You couldn’t have known,” Andrew says slowly. “Back then you weren’t much more than a kid.”

Freddie shakes her head. "There’s no excuse,“ she says. “I ought to have asked to be shown a copy of George’s death certificate at the very least.”

“This isn’t on you,” Andrew insists. “After what your folks did – and look. Even George could’ve let you know he was still around, if he’d wanted to –“

“My mother and father simply weren’t to be trusted. They were always - as I should have realized long before this - capable of deluding themselves to a quite extraordinary extent. As for my brother, as you’ve said yourself he’s always led something of a...troubled existence. I’ve no choice but to hold myself accountable for what’s happened.”

“Well, then, it isn’t all on you,” Laeddis tells her, exasperated. “Ever think your brother’s maybe not the only who’s way too hard on himself? Seems that’s something runs in your family, too.”

Freddie looks at him quizzically. “And that’s your role in all this, is it Mr Laeddis? Taking it upon yourself to explain away everyone’s past mistakes?”

“If they’re honest-to-goodness mistakes, maybe you don’t need to worry so much about explaining,” Andrew counters. “It’s over and done with. What matters now is what you plan on doing now you’ve got the information and –“

“What we’re going to do next,” Freddie interrupts, finishing his sentence for him.

Laeddis waits there a minute, watching doubtfully as Mrs Warren sits and taps her fingernail against her teeth. It’s pretty clear she’s already made her mind up – decided on a course of action well in advance of today’s little interview and if that’s the case, what she wanted to meet with him again for is anybody’s guess. Maybe she just wanted another look at him; a chance to assess the possible quality of ex-Ashecliffe Hospital goods because it has to be acknowledged that an older brother, returned from the dead but stowed safely in a lunatic asylum counts as being both out of sight and mind in every possible sense. That makes Laeddis wonder how Freddie’s going to play this; how next she’s going to react.

But she surprises him. “I suppose it’s a question,” Freddie says eventually, “of how we go about getting him back.”

Andrew stares at her. “Just like that. You really think you’re up to doing that?”

“Oh I should think so,” Freddie replies, squinting down her nose at him. “Definitely! Yes.”
If Laeddis is sceptical about Mrs Warren’s chances of securing her brother’s release, then he’s severely underestimated the range and scope of her influence, as well as her personal and political connections – because two days later, on a Sunday, she does it.

The following Sunday Freddie charters a sleek, ocean-going boat out of Boston harbour and a captain to pilot it. With her she has a waiver from the governor of Dedham Prison and an affidavit from the governor of the state. A trio of her legal advisers are on board, as well as two of the three relevant members of the Massachusetts Parole Board* and a letter of support from the third. It so happens that like the state governor, the parole board members are all previous acquaintances of Freddie’s – she knows them, of course, as a result of her campaigning work - and they don’t, unlike Mrs Dunlop’s green-faced, seasick doctor son-in-law, even appear to be accompanying her under duress.

They set out early in the morning. It’s not till much later that Andrew finds out they got back the same afternoon, because afterwards everything goes quiet.

For some reason Laeddis can’t get anyone to speak to him.

While Freddie’s party were gone he tried not to get his hopes up. In a way this was fortunate, because it’s a long wait of three more days before he receives any sort of news at all. Even Mrs Dunlop’s taken to avoiding him.

At last he corners her on her way out of the house, and asks her for information about Noyce.

“Oh, Andrew,” she says, sad-faced, “you should have told us.”

“Told us?” Laeddis repeats.

Mrs Dunlop won’t look him in the eye. “I mean it would have been better if you’d told Freddie the truth about you – and him.”

Andrew really isn’t expecting to hear that. He knows he's long-since waived his rights to patient confidentiality - but what about Noyce’s? Shouldn't his rights count for something too? “What did they tell her?” he asks faintly.

“My dear,” Lettice replies gently, “Freddie says they told her everything.”

There are all sorts of inconvenient truths that could be told about Laeddis and George Noyce – not to mention so many definitions of ‘everything’ that that stops Andrew in his tracks; stops him for long enough to allow Lettice to bustle past him and out into the street.

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As for Freddie, following her return from Shutter Island there hasn’t so much been a cooling in relations between herself and Laeddis as a situation in which Andrew finds himself completely frozen out. He has her home number but the first time he tries to reach the Warren residence is told that Freddie is not at home, and on the next dozen tries after that the receiver isn’t picked up at all. The phone’s just left to ring out and out.

At last he manages to speak to Mrs Warren by telephone. To begin with she talks around the subject.

“The situation I found out on the island,” she tells him, “wasn’t straightforward, particularly in relation to a number of administrative...discrepancies that seem to have occurred regarding my
brother’s long-term accommodation and treatment. It seems he was transferred to Ashecliffe Hospital – effectively sent on loan to them if you like – at a time when he ought to have been an ideal candidate for parole. I won’t bore you with the details, but in the light of that and also taking into account his subsequent difficulties, the hospital board have ultimately agreed to transfer George into my care.”

“Is he there with you now?”

There’s a long pause.

“He is,” Freddie says.

“Can I see him?”

Freddie answers immediately. “That isn’t a good idea. Not going to be possible, I’m afraid.”

“I’m coming over there,” Andrew tells her. “I want to see George. I’ll camp out on your doorstep if I have to.”

“I shouldn’t try anything like that if I were you,” Freddie replies coolly, “because as I understand it, wouldn’t travel outside of the city put you in direct violation of the conditions of your parole? And in any case,” she goes on, sounding sorry, now, for Laeddis more than anything else, “you don’t know where we live.” And with that she hangs up the receiver.

TBC

*It’s not entirely relevant, but as mentioned before, parole was quite a popular option at around the time this story is set. Parole boards consisting of up to 10 people granted parole (or not) by majority vote. There was one Parole Board per state and also(?) the (country-wide / federal??) United States Board of Parole - which consisted of three people in the 1950s.

Cards on the table: I don’t know enough to be able to say whether George Noyce’s parole would be treated as a state or federal matter. Dedham jail, from which he would have officially had to have been released, has had its status changed from state to federal prison over time and as it’s no longer in use as a penitentiary (I think I read that the building may even have recently been converted to residential flats) detailed information on it, from where I’m sitting, is rather scant.

But I have been able to determine that in 1955 the Parole Board for the state of Massachusetts consisted of five people, three men and two women, but as the women’s opinion was only sought when female prisoners were under consideration, the number of parole board members that Freddie would need to butter up in order to secure her brother’s release is still three, whether the state or federal parole board were responsible for deciding Noyce’s case.

As it turns out Freddie Warren, née Noyce, isn’t especially difficult for Laeddis to locate. He mightn’t know where she lives exactly but she let slip she wasn’t in the city and he knows, from overhearing her speak to Mrs Dunlop, that she has a house in the country just outside of Boston, and also that the garden of that house abuts the Concord river on one of its sides.

Concord seems as good a starting point as any. The river isn’t a long one – it’s just a shortish stretch of tributary, bordered for much of its length by belts of thick forest and low-lying patches of wetland and after studying a map at the public library it’s not difficult for Laeddis to narrow his search to a roundabout a half-dozen or so possible, river-fronting properties. He takes a train there on his next day off, catching a branch line from the outskirts of the city to the town of Concord. It’s a sleepy little place - and steeped in literary history, that lies to the south and east of the river which shares its name.

A light rain starts falling as Laeddis makes his way along the wide main street, past rows of painted shop-fronts and low, brick and wooden-fronted properties. The first of the places he’s come to look at is out past the western edge of town and is obviously derelict, with only the aged footprint of the house remaining visible through the dense underbrush of crawling vines and foliage that have grown up around it. An overgrown path at one side of the steeply sloping garden winds through trees to the river. Andrew follows it and stands for a while on the nearest bank, staring distractedly down at the sluggishly-moving water. As he watches the slow current he feels a momentary sense of confusion – and foreboding; acknowledging to himself for once the likely futile nature of the task he’s set out to accomplish. What’s brought it on at this time he couldn’t say; perhaps it’s just the yellow autumn leaves, lowering grey sky and rain-pocked, muddy river that all combine to make the place he’s standing in a deeply dismal spot. With an effort, Andrew shakes off his misgivings and climbs the steps back through the garden up towards the road.

The weather worsens as he continues his search, drawing blanks at the second, third and fourth houses and Laeddis, who has neither an umbrella nor overcoat is wet to the skin by the time he recognizes Freddie’s car, standing outside the second-to-last house.

The gates across the entranceway are closed but not locked. Andrew, spurred on again by buoyant hope hurries to the front door - where he’s met by a soberly-dressed housekeeper who looks him up and down suspiciously as he introduces himself as a visitor for Mr George Noyce.

She asks Laeddis if he’s expected and when he replies he isn’t shuts the door on him and goes to make enquiries inside. There’s a long wait before he’s eventually invited into the house, where he finds himself in a dreary-looking entrance hallway. With its black-and-white tiled floor and the panels of dark, aged wood that appear to be covering every other available surface Laeddis notes in passing that the look of the place isn’t a million miles from the decor in the big house on Shutter Island.

Mrs Warren’s housekeeper, her expression openly hostile now, curtly tells Laeddis to stay where he is. Pointedly closing a large pair of double-doors behind her she carries on into the big, white-carpeted reception room that Laeddis glimpses beyond.

Left to his own devices for the time being, at length Andrew takes a seat by the front door at an ornately-carved telephone desk. He’s cold and foot-sore and tired, and after being left alone for getting on for an hour is starting to wonder if he’ll ever actually have a chance to see his friend. With
some plan of getting a letter, or even a note to him, he reaches for the telephone pad and begins writing down his address.

At that point the housekeeper returns, beckoning for Andrew and telling him that –

“Mrs Warren will see you now.”

Before he follows her Laeddis absently tears the top sheet he’s been writing on from the block of paper and scrunches it up in his pocket.

Freddie’s waiting for him in the reception room he caught a look at earlier. It’s a massive, open area that must run for much of the length of the (already generously proportioned) ground floor of the house. In contrast to the gloomy hallway Laeddis has just come in from it’s bright, and full of air and space: tastefully - unobtrusively – decorated and furnished with a few solid, comfortable pieces made chiefly of light-coloured fabric and pale wood. Everything looks very expensive. And it’s even more to take in because Freddie has company.

It isn’t George. Neither of the two frankly, hulking great non-Freddie figures who Laeddis sees in the room with Mrs Warren could possibly ever be mistaken for being Noyce. No, by Andrew’s reckoning you’d need two to three George Noyces all squashed together and combined to make approximately the mass of just one of these big, big guys.

Maybe that’s a slight exaggeration. They have on identical uniforms, all in white – and it could well be a design choice, so they'll co-ordinate right in with the rest of the colour-scheme - but even if white clothes do tend to make a person bigger, these two really are beyond averagely large.

Freddie, looking poised and collected, is seated at a coffee-table on one of her fancy suede-and-leather sofas. It’s impossible to tell what kind of an animal went into the upholstering of it - skinned unicorn, quite possibly. She doesn’t get up or greet Laeddis as he comes in.

“Who’re these guys?” Andrew asks incredulously, his gaze drawn irresistibly towards and also flickering between Man Mountains (A) and (B). He turns to the nearest one of them, and finds the guy looks definitely – kind of - familiar. “Don’t I know you?” he says. “Haven’t we – haven’t I seen you from somewhere before?”

The white-garbed giant folds his arms deliberately, upper arm muscles bulging. He doesn’t answer.

“I’ve chosen to engage the services of these two gentlemen for the time being,” Freddie explains, instead. “They come highly recommended.”

“They come highly recommended?” Laeddis echoes. “As what?”

“As highly-trained and experienced psychiatric nurses, of course! I’ve hired them to help oversee the demands of my brother’s current... condition. I’m sure you’ll understand how important it was for us to ensure some continuity of care - and we were lucky enough that George’s doctor at the hospital turned out to be very accommodating in that respect. I expect that’ll be why you recognise Nurse Shaw,” Freddie says, gesturing towards him. “He’s very kindly agreed to oversee George’s transition from Ashecliffe – at least until he’s a little more... comfortable here. Found his feet and settled in.”

“Are these two here all the time?”

“They are, or their replacements - we have other people covering the night-shift, naturally,” Freddie replies. “I have space here for George – and as you see we're in a quiet, country setting - ideal in many respects, but unfortunately what I don't have is necessarily the wherewithal to deal with the challenges posed by his... mental circumstance. I’ve been advised that my brother’s interests will
undoubtedly be best served if he enjoys constant medical supervision.”

Which means that day and night, they’re watching him. Laeddis stays where is and thinks about that with Nurse Shaw and Mrs Warren while the other one is sent to go and fetch Noyce. He guides him in, steering him through from some other part of the house, one heavy hand resting at all times - almost casually - on Noyce’s shoulder. His other hand grips Noyce’s elbow, holding extra tight.

George is dressed in clean plaid pyjamas and is wearing a pair of bedroom slippers.

It’s three in the afternoon.

He hasn’t been told to expect Laeddis. Andrew wonders how much his loving sister and ‘trained nurses’ even bother talking to him.

Noyce stands beside his nurse with his shoulders hunched, head down and his eyes on the floor, and he’s as slight and pale and colourless-looking as ever. Someone’s clipped his hair short and scraped quite a bit of skin off doing it – Laeddis can all too well imagine the mad rush back at Ashecliffe to get him looking scrubbed-up and halfway presentable - and maybe he’s a little thinner than when Laeddis last saw him, but at least nothing else /too terrible seems to have happened in the interim. Andrew’s overwhelmingly relieved to find that really, Noyce doesn’t look all that different.

There’s dust in the room - or maybe something else is making a prickling sensation at the back of Laeddis’ eyes, and that’s probably why his voice come out a little hoarse.

“Georgie?” he says.

Noyce starts as soon as he hears him and his head jerks up. And probably you’d have to know Noyce as well as Laeddis does, but for someone who knew what to look for and was quick enough to catch it, at that moment they’d have seen his worn, unshaven face positively lighting up with pleasure and disbelief. It’s gone the next instant however and the dull, expressionless expression George is always so careful to maintain shutters down again.

But he holds Andrew’s gaze in his washed-out, tired eyes, staring back at him helplessly. He looks ridiculously small, standing there by his two burly nurses in Freddie’s elegant white drawing-room.

The relief Laeddis experiences on seeing his friend washes over him like a flood of physical sensation. He hurries towards Noyce, quickly crossing the space between them as George shuffles a hesitant step forward. But then he looks uncertainly up at his attendant, glances over at his sister, then stops short and falls back, hanging his head.

“It’s me, Andrew!” Laeddis exclaims, nonplussed, as Noyce shrinks back from him, and back another step. “Don’t you remember?” He reaches for him but the smaller man ducks under his arm and away. “What’s the matter, George?” Laeddis says, confused and not quite believing his friend’s reaction as he appeals to him again.

“There’s - rules,” George whispers at length, still staring fixedly down at the floor. “You’re not supposed’ta - we’re not allowed.” He shuffles his feet slightly and darts a quick, pleading look up at Andrew. “Don’t you remember?”

Freddie, meanwhile, has been watching them sceptically.

“Look. Okay, look, that’s true,” Laeddis says to her. “When we were patients we couldn’t – that is they didn’t let us have contact with each other in the hospital -”

“For which there’s very good reason in your case as I understand it, isn’t there Mr Laeddis?” Freddie
Laeddis blanches. “That was a terrible mistake –“

“Completely unprovoked,” Freddie says implacably. “I notice you’re not even trying to deny it.”

“It was a set-up -”

“And I was also informed of the curious and unhealthy fixation you’ve cultivated on poor George. I should say I was warned about it, rather. You pose a definite and ongoing danger to him, Mr Laeddis. That’s the information I’ve been given.”

“What they said isn’t true,” Andrew replies helplessly. “They’re twisting it –“

“After the help you’ve been in locating George,” Freddie continues smoothly, “not to mention your – really remarkable persistence, which I may say in the light of today’s events I do find quite above and beyond the call, I was prepared to give you some benefit of the doubt. I’m sorry Mr Laeddis, but I can see for myself that your presence here is upsetting my brother.”

“He’s upset all right,” Andrew counters, “but don’t you think maybe it’s because of these guys you’ve got keeping round-the-clock watch on him? George doesn’t need constant supervision, and especially not from guys like these. Want to know something? These ‘highly trained nurses’ you’ve hired aren’t just nurses - they’re the type of goons they had in hospital to rough us up and keep us all in line. Can’t you see that’s what’s putting the wind up him?”

“As I say, I’ve been strongly advised otherwise,” Freddie. “My brother’s present...mental challenges require careful management. A Dr Cawley who was kind enough to speak to me at the hospital was extremely helpful, in this respect –“

“Dr Cawley! Right! Well if you’ve been talking to Dr Cawley then there’s no prizes for guessing what a pack of nonsense you’ve been fed. He’s had George' card marked since the start – stood by and let your brother be lobotomized! Was he helpful enough when you were talking to him at the hospital to remember to tell you that?”

“Lobotomized?” Freddie repeats sceptically. “There’s no mention of any such thing on any of George’s case-notes, which of course I’ve scrutinized, at length. He’s – rather confused at present, that’s all. And no wonder! That’s the reason he was readmitted to the hospital, following another complete, nervous breakdown.”

“Nervous breakdown! If he’s confused it’s on account of having his head sliced-into, more like!”

“I’ve no doubt you’re mistaken!” Freddie thinks for a moment then adds - “ I mean there isn’t even any obvious scarring - anything as you’d expect from an operation like that-“

Laeddis snorts. “Don’t you even know how they like to do it these days? They jam a metal spike up in back of your eyes! I saw what they did a couplea’ days after, and those docs left George in such a goddamn awful state – “

Freddie shakes her head. “I’m sure the Dr Cawley I met would never authorize that kind of procedure!”

“Why don’t you ask George what he thinks about what Dr Cawley would or wouldn’t give the go-ahead to, seeing how it was Dr Cawley who had him transferred out from prison in the first place!
They put George back in hospital ’cause they felt like it – threatened him with god-knows what just ’cause it fit in with their plans when he ought to have been walking free – and I wonder, Mrs Warren, did Dr Cawley also happen to mention that? So before you get up on your high horse, maybe you should get to know your brother - instead of believing everything that guy said.”

It’s clear that Freddie, who has only been doing her best, has been somewhat taken aback by this new information. Laeddis, however, uses her momentary confusion to step between the two assistants - who have closed-in on the now, frankly cowering, Noyce. Andrew only has a moment before he’s grasped firmly round his upper arms by ‘Nurse Shaw’ and borne, by force away - but it’s enough time for him to slip the shred of telephone paper on which he’s written his street address into George’s top pyjama pocket.

“If you want me to be here you gotta speak up,” he tells him. “Say something now, George.”

Noyce darts a sideways look at the colossus to his left and shakes his head desperately. “Gettin’ us in trouble, Teddy -”

And that’s more than enough for Freddie. “As I’ve said, I’m sorry for you, Mr Laeddis,” she tells him, gesturing for her strong-arm assistant to escort him out, “but this has gone on long enough. I can’t say who ‘Teddy’ might be, but you’re causing a commotion and it’s obvious to everyone that at this moment my brother isn’t even able to recognize you.”

Laeddis is shown the door. They take George back to wherever they’re keeping him and Nurse Shaw drives Andrew to the railway station and stays with him till he’s seen Laeddis on board a city-bound train.

Andrew sits at a window-seat as he’s borne back to Boston through the gathering dusk.

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“We was acquaintances all right at Ashecliffe, and I always thought you were okay - for a crazy guy,” Nurse Shaw told him, when they were at the station waiting for Laeddis’ train. “An’ on account of that I’m going to give you a little advice. You better watch out ’cause if you keep on the way you’re going, you’re gonna end up making some powerful enemies for yourself.”

“Oh yeah?” Andrew replies wearily. “So you’re still on Ashecliffe's payroll, is that what you’re saying? Don’t tell me - Dr Cawley’s got you sending daily reports back to him or something?”

“It’s not Dr Cawley you gotta worry about,” Shaw says, “It’s her - Mrs Warren. Guy like you doesn’t want to get the wrong side of a lady like that. That day she showed up at the hospital, wasn’t long before she had every one of them – docs, prison board, the whole caboose – running scared. Now personally I don’t get why she’s bothering, but she honest-to-god seems’ care about that little - creep - brother of hers. So you’re gonna stay away from him. Leave them alone. I don’t want to see you back here again.”

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Laeddis leans his head against the misty windowpane, closes his eyes and listens to the noise of the train against the tracks. Looks like he’s played his hand against Freddie and, so far, has lost. What happens next, he supposes, is up to his old friend Noyce.

Given Noyce's current condition, that isn’t an especially comforting thought.
TBC
Meanwhile, what’s Noyce been making of all of this?

After all this time he doesn’t have much agency, which is to say much decision-making capability left. Really, what’s the point for such a person as Noyce, life-sentenced in an institution? In hospital, as it was in prison, every aspect of his daily life is regulated - the clothes he wears, the meals he eats, the time he goes to bed and rises - or even wakes and falls asleep - it’s all in someone else’s hands: every waking moment accounted for, every action controlled. His life has been this way for so long that a lot of the time he’s unable to remember – is beginning, now, to be unable even to imagine – a state of – of – (he’s not sure what you’d call it) – well. Of not-living-like-this.

Still, before the operation and even sometimes after it he used to –

But that’s all gone now. Before Noyce left the hospital his doctors made sure a thick sheaf of new prescriptions were written -

And that means that these days he’s very, very heavily-mediated.

Even George’s removal from Ashecliffe Hospital was an event that fell outside his own control. He was taken from his cell – he’d been sitting quietly, waiting for the next round of group therapy – hauled to the communal shower-room, and stripped and washed and made to look presentable. Noyce struggled and he’d wept – begging them not to, when they began to close-cut his hair – showing more fight and life and language skills, and demonstrating more consciousness of his surroundings than any of them had seen from Noyce in months, so they thought it best to call Dr Cawley for a second opinion. In the meantime they finished his haircut and restrained him for safe-keeping. Noyce had thought – it’s little wonder he’d thought - that this was a pre-operative procedure; that he was in for another round of brain-surgery perhaps, for which it was necessary to clean and prep him –

(Preparing him is of course exactly what his nurses were doing, only this was preparation with a slightly different end in sight.)

The highly-agitated state that Noyce is in makes Cawley tilt his head and narrow his eyes at him. He takes his prescription-pad out of his breast pocket at that point, and quickly starts writing on it. George doesn’t know it but Freddie - and the lawyers employed by Freddie are in the building, and there’s no time for his doctors to be able to fix much else.

And what does Dr Cawley think?

Now, Cawley considers himself to be a man of scrupulous high-principle. He answers only to a higher scientific code. This means his values, then, sometimes fall beyond those shared by the common, less-exalted herd.

George Noyce was always incidental to his experiment – or rather to the therapy he sought to test on Laeddis. Any damages to Noyce’s person were unplanned and inadvertent – resulting not from ill-will or even negligence, and thus doubly irrelevant when measured from an objective viewpoint of the greater good. According to Cawley’s lights his conduct in this matter’s been impeccable, completely beyond reproach.
Morally and ethically therefore there is little he should feel the need to hide. Noyce was never the focus of his intentions. Moreover a man like that, so steeped in vice, should have no right to count himself an injured party. He’s merely an irrelevance - a casualty of circumstance who’s been dropped down along the way.

At the same time however, Cawley knows full well that Noyce’s current incarceration at the hospital, and that the treatments past and recent he’s received there could be seen from certain standpoints as being legally suspect, at best. Certain details of procedure and other incriminating documents accordingly are excised from Noyce’s file. After this is done there remains only one potentially-troublesome source of full disclosure: the man himself.

To wit, the now-surprisingly-lucid horse’s mouth.

Now he’s seen the danger it’s an easy enough matter for Dr Cawley, armed with his prescription pad, to ensure Noyce keeps it closed.

So that’s where George’s new drugs came from - as well as the reason for it. He’s immediately injected with a good, fast-acting dose.

The new stuff robs Noyce of his faculties completely. Afterwards he can’t think straight, walk unaided, or even speak. They have to place him in a wheelchair because his legs have gone to jelly; he’s unable even to properly focus his eyes - and, because this medicine has some definitely muscle-relaxing effects, there’s a distressing sensation in his lower body that makes him wonder if he might’ve...wet himself. And this is the stuff he’s on when they wheel him out and hand him over to Freddie, passing him on as casually as if he’s no more than a misfiled piece of paperwork.

He’s no idea who any of these new people are, but apparently they’re intending to take him on a boat.

Noyce might have been forcibly placed into an overly relaxed mental state, but he has by reason of association developed quite a fear of boats and if he could’ve, would’ve liked to state his objection to any maritime excursioning quite clearly at this point. But he can’t do that.

Instead he thrashes from side to side in his wheelchair, striving to make his wishes known, causing a horribly undignified scene over which poor Noyce, if at that moment he’d been even halfway composit mentis would’ve been absolutely mortified.

But Freddie Warren to her credit doesn’t waver; even faced with Noyce in a state that’s very far from being his best gives no sign of second thoughts or of wondering what exactly she’s taking on. She does however change her mind about Nurse Shaw, the short-term services of whom the hospital have been kindly offering to loan her to ‘ease Mr Noyce’s transition’ until she makes a more permanent arrangement. She’d been polite but firm in her resistance to that prospect, up until then.

With all this going on it’s a while before Noyce gets a proper look at the woman who’s come to take him.

He doesn’t recognize Freddie. George’s sister, from his fractured and at present, not-quite-with-it point of view is still a little girl. Much later on he dimly comes to realize that it’s this woman’s home that he’s now living in, but what she wants with him he continues to have absolutely no idea. To Noyce the tall, imposing woman who’s taken charge of him is just another figure of authority and therefore of oppression, yet another person to be feared.

Not that George, these days, is much capable of experiencing any particularly high level of fright.
The daily cocktail of anti-psychotics and sedatives he’s been placed upon affect him even more adversely than his lobotomy. They blunt and deaden Noyce’s feelings, squashing his emotions flat.

So, in Freddie’s house very little changes for him day to day. The setting’s new but Noyce’s life drags on as much as it did as in Ashecliffe only now, incredibly, in yet greater-straigtened circumstance: the pharmaceuticals he now accepts with docile inevitability imprison him in a twilight world that’s neither fully sleep nor waking, from which he’s now unable to even envision an escape.

George’s life drags on. Time has little meaning, in his drug-edged hazy state. He remembers, and he doesn’t quite remember Teddy, a friend of his, thoughts of whom once provided him with some measure of respite -

Teddy - he’s pretty sure his friend’s name’s Teddy - promised he’d come back for Noyce, that he’d get him out of here -

Trouble is, George couldn’t really say what counts as being ‘here’ at present, because he hasn’t much idea of where he is. The place isn’t a conventional prison exactly, but neither is Noyce free to come and go.

He’s been put into a suite of guest-rooms on the ground floor of Freddie’s Concord house – rooms that have been hastily equipped as a mini-sanatorium of sorts. George has his own bedroom, bathroom and there’s even an adjoining sitting room – assuming he was in any fit state to use it. That’s where his night-nurses’ beds have been placed for the time being.

In George’s room there’s a wardrobe in which hang – perhaps over-optimistically – several fresh sets of new clothes. Since his arrival Noyce has been largely confined to his bed and his bedroom by the after-effects and efforts of his drugs and the nurses combined, so he’s had little opportunity to use any of those.

One sunny day he’s taken out for a walk round the garden, with his nurses telling him where he should go. Down from the house there are trees and a river; yellow leaves against a clean stretch of water, slow and wide and green.

It’s very beautiful. Noyce can’t remember when he was last outside - let alone the last time he had the chance to simply stand and look at a sight like that, and after a while he realizes he’s no longer on Shutter Island. This fact seems important, though for the life of him he doesn’t recall why.

Every afternoon since Noyce got here he’s been taken to visit the tall woman. She always speaks to George very clearly, enunciating all her words carefully and in a measured, cheerful tone.

Noyce rarely dares to answer back because he doesn’t much like the look of her. She almost puts him in mind of Dr Cawley, the way she talks down to him.

So, the next time they take him to visit that woman Noyce, as usual, is staring down at the floor and listlessly shuffling his feet so he won’t have to see her frightening, yet in a way worryingly familiar face. It’s because of this that George doesn’t realize till he actually starts speaking that that’s the day Teddy’s picked to come to call.

The sound of his voice –

‘Georgie?’ he says, and Noyce would know him from it even in the absence of – well, everything,
really, because Teddy’s the only one ever called him that –

-Teddy’s voice sends a jolt of sensation jumping all the way up his spine. It’s nerves or adrenaline; he feels a clutch in his chest – is his heart actually leaping? – and the fog George now has to live in thins for an instant. He looks up at his friend and holds his gaze desperately, wanting to run to him, or shout with joy - but he’s frozen: can’t make his legs move and no sound will come out of his throat.

So George just stands and stares at him - stares at Teddy's dear, familiar, pinched and anxious face - because this is another thing he hasn’t been able to do for such a long time.

His moment of clarity can’t last. Teddy moves closer – and when he reaches to touch him Noyce abjectly dissolves into fear. Doesn’t he see they’re in front of the orderlies? George is terrified of these orderlies, and he knows for a fact (wasn’t it....Teddy first told him?) that this absolutely isn’t allowed.

An argument starts up around him. There are raised voices and shouting; and George shrinks into himself even more than before. It ends with his friend Teddy being summarily escorted out.

Back Noyce goes to his room.

It’s not till he rolls over to lie on his side in his bed much later that night that a slight rustle of paper from his pyjama pocket makes Noyce realize Teddy has slipped him a note. Noyce spends some time puzzling over what’s written on it. At first the words jump and blur, refusing to come into focus. Then - Noyce sees the letters but can’t make sense of the writing; it’s as if some connection’s been lost in his brain. He cries with frustration, cursing his drugs for doing this, for withholding Teddy’s message to him –

And then a funny thing happens.

“What you should do is refuse to take ’em,” Noyce suddenly hears his friend say, clear as day, as if he’s sitting right there in the room.

So in the end it’s that not-even-letter from Teddy that saves him because it gives Noyce enough impetus, just barely enough impetus, to make him to react.

“Stop taking your meds,” Teddy said, so that’s what Noyce does.

By now they don’t bother to monitor him very closely, George’s nurses, because so far he’s been no trouble at all. They don’t even check under his tongue or the sides of his mouth after they give him his tablets, so it’s easy for Noyce not to swallow them all. He hides the pills between his back teeth, secretly spits them out after and disposes of them, down the flush-toilet.

Not taking the drugs is hard going at first. As the high-dosage chemicals start leaving his system Noyce is gripped by a fever and headache and abdominal cramps. His nurses think it’s just a bad case of the ‘flu.

It takes almost three full days for Noyce’s head to clear, till he’s able to read the address that Laeddis left for him.

Late that night, when it’s quiet, he takes one set of the clothes from the wardrobe and one of the new pairs of shoes. He might not recognize Freddie, but he understands who she is now – why she’s done what she’s done, and that she’s the one bought them for him. If feels bad about leaving - well, Laeddis or Teddy are waiting. There’s nothing he can do about that.
There’s no bars on the windows of his sister’s house. One has even been left half-open tonight, light, patterned curtain billowing in the warm night-time breeze. Working very quietly on tiptoes, Noyce eases it out all the way. Carefully he clambers through, dropping noiselessly down onto soft, dew-soaked grass.

He stands on the lawn for moment, amazed by the moonlight, the size of the night and sensation of wide-open space. Noyce reels where he is for a moment, feeling quite overcome.

Then he takes to his heels and runs for it.

TBC
By this point Laeddis has no choice but to wait. He’s no option but to carry on as normal, so every morning he sets out across the city to his place of work and in the evening returns to his lodgings again – to wait. What he’s waiting for is word, or a visit from Noyce. Or a sign, or anything. A call.

Nothing happens till the end of the week.

On Friday morning Mrs Dunlop comes to talk to him, as the bearer of some very bad news. She tells Laeddis that his friend George Noyce went missing from Freddie Warren’s house two nights ago.

Lettice doesn’t say he ‘absconded’ or ‘escaped.’

But that’s what Laeddis thinks - he hopes - he did, and if so that bad news is quite possibly good news in this particular case.

Even after an extensive, county-wide search – there’s been no sign of Noyce since. A window in his room was left open by accident, and lately he’d been so terribly – confused - that who knows what Freddie’s brother must have been thinking –

Laeddis interrupts her. “What about those hired night nurses,” he says. “Didn’t they see he’d flown the coop? What did those guys have to say?”

Lettice relates that yes, the nurses had been checking on their patient, but it seems that on the night Noyce’s pillows, as well as some of the blankets from his bed happened to be heaped up under the coverlet in just such a way as to give the impression of a solid body beneath -

How’s that for a coincidence, Laeddis thinks. “No kidding,” he says blandly. “Somehow it got to look like George was still in bed? That’s terrible. What a stroke of bad luck - no kidding.”

-and anyway, given his delicate mental state – Mrs Dunlop breaks off here, dabbing her eyes in genuine sympathy at the thought of ‘poor George’s’ possible fate -

Well, they’ve started dragging the river. They’re already preparing themselves for the very worst.

Freddie, Lettice tells him is, of course, utterly distraught.

“I’m aware there was some unpleasantness between you,” Mrs Dunlop says, “but my heart truly goes out to you both.” She pats Laeddis gently on the shoulder. “I could see what your friend meant to you. I’m so sorry for your loss.”

Andrew does his best to put on a brave face.

**

Laeddis doesn’t even make it through the rest of the day. Crying off work sometime in mid-afternoon, he hurries back across town scarcely daring to hope – but George isn’t at the half-way house.
Fear and exhilaration and more than a smidgen of doubt have Laeddis sweating right through his shirt. His head’s started pounding and his collar’s too tight. Gasping for air like a fish he staggers out of the hostel again. Opposite, over on the other side of the street there’s – well, it’s not even a park, really. Just a bench stepped back from the roadside on a square of sparse dusty grass and shaded by overhanging trees.

That’s where Andrew goes. He sits down and waits where he is for his heart to stop racing, keeps sitting on his bench for a long, long time until at last the rush and bustle of the city fades around him and the last of the warm summer evening bleeds into dark.

And then, once the streetlamps are shining whitely, casting light and black shadows through the old summer leaves, there’s a flicker of hesitant movement at the corner of Laeddis’ eye. The moment passes. Then Noyce quietly slips round to Andrew’s side of the bench and sits down beside him.

George seems pretty jittery, so at first Laeddis doesn’t dare turn and look at him properly, in case he takes it into his head to bolt. But, through sidelong glances, he’s able to ascertain that it is really his friend, that this time he’s appropriately dressed for the season in a shirt, jacket and slacks, and also he’s trying to make himself as small as possible, sitting hunched with his feet tucked back under the seat and his hands pressed tight between his knees.

He starts slightly as Andrew shuffles nearer, closing the distance between them. They don’t speak but after a moment Laeddis sighs and stretches, dropping the arm on Noyce’s side oh-so-casually down to rest on the back of the seat behind him.

And they sit there - close, but not quite touching. George won’t look at him either; bobs his head and squints downward instead, so that when eventually he does start talking, he addresses himself directly to the buttonhole on Andrew’s lapel.

“Didn’t you – I thought you said to come here?” Noyce begins, following a couple of false starts. He shows him the little twist of paper he’s been hanging onto so tightly – Laeddis’ note, now looking all crumpled and smudged, that he’s been clutching in his knees.

“Yeah, George,” Andrew replies, “you got it. That’s exactly what I did.”

Noyce uncurls enough that his shoulder brushes up against Laeddis’, almost. Not much, but perhaps enough for a start. He fingers the edge of Laeddis’ jacket, still not looking at him. “We allowed?” he asks nervously. “T’d-o – like this?”

“It’s okay,” Andrew assures him, “anything you want.”

“Sure about that?”

“Sure, I’m sure. Who’s gonna try an’ stop us this time, right?”

“Shrinks?” Noyce suggests, shaking his head vaguely. “Prison guards. The orderlies, maybe –”

Laeddis tells him there’s no-one like that here.

“There isn’t? I thought for sure I saw one just now when I was out on the wards – or, or coming down the street, I mean –”

Noyce’s voice trails off and his eyes start darting back and forth fearfully. He’s beginning to get a glazed kind of look that’s making Laeddis wonder if he’s properly aware of where he is.

“You got it all turned round,” Andrew insists. “There’s no orderlies anywhere near.”
“Yeah?” Noyce counters, glancing up at him with flash of sudden, startlingly lucidity, “’cept for those goons my sister hired to keep an eye on me, huh?”

Laeddis cocks an eyebrow at him. “You talkin’ about your nurses, George? That sis of yours was pretty insistent from now on you’re gonna be receiving nothing but the best in top-drawer psychiatric care.”

“From heavies,” Noyce snorts. “From prison guards an’ orderlies, just like I said.”

“Well – maybe, but she got you out, didn’t she, Georgie? I didn’t think she could do it, but she did. That was all her doing, you know. I tried, but I couldn’t’ve gotten you away from there.”

Noyce squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head in irritation. “Outta...where?” he asks at last, voice wavering slightly. He might seem like he’s doing well, for a recently-absconded mental patient who’s just managed to navigate his way in from the suburbs and across the half the city, but the stresses and strains are beginning to show.

Laeddis clasps him by the shoulder, shoving him back-and-forth in place to try and snap him out of it. “You okay George?” he demands. “Still with me?”

“Sorry, Teddy,” Noyce replies, shuddering weakly. “They got me takin’ – all sorts’a pills. I remember – an’ I don’t remember.” His head drops forwards onto Andrew’s chest and he slumps against him, shivering in the early autumnal chill.

Sighing deeply, Laeddis folds his arms around his friend, closes his eyes and leans on him. Their situation isn’t any less uncertain than it was, say, this time yesterday – and given the circumstances and setting, simply having him near comes as more of a comfort to Laeddis than possibly it should. But since leaving the hospital Andrew’s had only the hope and anticipation of a moment like this one to sustain him, and so for a little while he steps back from his worries and the difficulty and revels in the simple, physical fact of Noyce. It occurs to him to wonder briefly what George, in his clearly confused mental state is making of being held onto so tightly out there in the dark but doesn’t dare ask him, for fear of further disturbing his friend’s already-fragile state of mind.

But when Noyce turns his face up to Laeddis’, having to stretch up to reach him, and cranes his neck so that Andrew can start kissing his mouth, that pretty much removes all doubt. It’s gauche - terribly awkward at first: George runs into trouble when he tries to start reciprocating, fumbling it a bit so their teeth clink together - and he’s not much idea what to do with his tongue; but it’s also every bit as messed-up and sweet as all the other times Laeddis (thinks he) has remembered and he kisses Noyce repeatedly, gently stroking his face and throat.

The street’s quiet, and they’re hidden from view by the screen of kindly leaves so they stay like that for a while.

“Andrew,” George says, breaking away from him eventually. “We oughta’ get out of here. Have you got...d’you have some place we can go?”

By now it’s cold and it’s late and his friend looks like he’s on the verge of passing out. Andrew hustles him across the road and over to the hostel, and has him hide out on the fire-escape while he signs himself in on the register.

It’s not till about half-way through the dressing-down he’s getting from his landlord Mr Myerson for being over two hours late for his curfew that Laeddis’ reaction sets in.

Andrew’s reasonably certain that he’s been able to discriminate dreams from reality for a while now,
so it’s been some time since he’s had to endure a cruel fantasy of, say, a lover disintegrating from right out of his arms. But as he waits meekly, being ranted at, he can’t help but start to doubt his own senses.

Laeddis feels his grasp on reality slipping - it’s as if he’s seeing himself in two places at once: here and now in the bacon-grease smelling, yellow hallway of Myerson’s half-way house, yet only a little while ago out in the night in the city, finally being reunited with Noyce.

At last he’d done it - Andrew had got Noyce back or at any rate, that’s what he’d thought. But long experience has taught – or rather prolonged experience in therapy and with psychiatrists has trained Laeddis to question; to worry, and worry, and question – especially in the face of a happening that on the surface appears to be agreeable, or good.

And it occurs to him that these two different images – these two drastically contrasting versions of his life he’s seeing may be simple ciphers - representations, or stand-ins; everyday life versus fantasy, just the type of hopeless fancy he knows he should distrust.

So Andrew stands in the hallway of his boarding house on the verge of panic, wondering if it can really be safe for him to trust what’s increasingly seeming to be a most unlikely memory. Myerson keeps him stalled there for some time and all the while Laeddis’ misgivings fester and exponentially increase.

He still remembers - won't ever be able to forget - the awful visions of Dolores that would end in soot and ashes, his dear wife’s body crumbling even as he pressed her to his breast. As for daydream-Noyce’s dissolution – Laeddis shudders, thinking of the form the ending of that vision would most likely take: George, struggling in a rats’ nest of bandages - bloodied restraints that strap his limbs and bind him, dragging him further and further out of Laeddis’ reach until he's eaten up in darkness; nothing left to see of him but a pair of needle-punctured, bruised and bleeding eyes –

Andrew staggers sideways at the thought of that horrid image, caught off-balance. At this point Myerson, having run out of steam finally gets round to noticing there’s something wrong with the kid.

**You’d never count Mr Recently-rehabilitated poster-boy for the criminally insane as exactly being the life and soul, but Myerson realizes then that Laeddis is extra pale and tortured-looking tonight. So the guy’s a dark horse - but Mr Myerson’s been in the game a long time and has seen all the types, and if Laeddis is even as half-way miserable as his day-to-day state appears to indicate then Myerson’s honestly and truly surprised he’s managed to make it this far without having offed himself already, with a noose strung from his light-bulb - or over the side of a bridge.

Just now Laeddis’ expression is faraway and downright glassy – it’s obvious he’s miles off on his own somewhere and seeing something else. Whatever he thinks he’s looking at can’t be good because as Myerson watches that perpetual weight-of-the-world frown he’s always wearing is deepening, his mouth working silently as he chews on ragged lips. He’s breathing in and out okay – breath’s coming a bit too quick if anything - yet can’t manage to catch enough air. The hospital docs have a fancy name for what’s up with him, Myerson thinks - but frankly he’s not being paid near enough to want to deal with this.

‘What will be, will be’ - isn’t that how the Ey-ties put it? Lovely sentiment – Myerson thinks it’d stand for a fine family motto, should he ever want one for his family tree, and absolutely fitting in this case because this sort of thing definitely counts as being none of his business. So he stands aside and lets Laeddis blunder breathlessly on up to his room.

**
Once Myerson’s behind him, Andrew fairly gallops upstairs to the third-floor landing - having by this time almost, but not-quite, convinced himself that he may indeed have started to... imagine things again. He props open the casement window, calls for Noyce softly and is actually half-surprised when after a moment, George comes climbing through.

They don’t quite make it up as far as the second turn in the stairs before Laeddis falls on him. He grabs and half-turns Noyce, shoving him – not gently – back into the corner of the stairwell. If Noyce is dismayed by this treatment – and he grunts, but otherwise doesn’t comment – it can’t be helped. It’s of utmost importance that Laeddis gets on with this, because he needs to confirm a few facts straight away. He runs his hands up and down Noyce’s flanks and the sides of his arms, touching his wrists and fingertips. Then he takes hold of his jaw moves it left and right and back again, all the while anxiously searching the smaller man’s face.

George appears to be solid and present enough for the moment - but the examination isn’t finished. Andrew spins him round, feeling the back of his head, shoulders, hips and backside – making George squawk when he bobs down – and up again – so he can test his ankles and the angle in back of his knees.

Abruptly Laeddis drops on him, letting his weight and the length of his body squash Noyce flush against the wall. He traps him in an awkward bear-hug - Noyce's back pressing tight to Andrew's front - shoves his face down against George's head, shuts his eyes and yes, that feels better. Andrew isn't thinking straight - nowhere near. All he's thinking about at this point is keeping hold of Noyce.

“Is it really you?” he asks urgently, whispering hoarsely into George's ear. “You sure you’re one-hundred-per-cent, for-definite here?”

“I think so,” Noyce replies, and he twists round – with some difficulty – so he ends up face to face with him. “I mean I’m pretty sure. Prob’ly. Yeah?”

“And you’re gonna be staying. Staying round here for a while, aren’t you - right?” Laeddis says, nodding his head frantically for confirmation.

Noyce squints up at him and smiles, mildly. Laeddis is beside himself – looks half out of his mind and yet not for a moment does it occur to George to be afraid. “I was planning I’d stay right here with you, Teddy, if that’s okay.”

“Promise me you’re not going anywhere,” Laeddis demands. He grabs hold of the sides of George’s suit jacket and shakes him back and forth to make his point.

“’Of course I’m not,” George exclaims. “I swear!”

In all the time Laeddis has know him, George has never once lied to him. It’s this - together with continued proximity to his friend, who’s still showing no incipient sign of vanishing, that finally convince Laeddis he’s telling the truth: that he’s here for real and good. The realization makes Andrew catch himself, uttering an inarticulate gasp of relief. Holding onto George’s jacket for balance he bows his head against Noyce’s chest and sags down to his knees – shaking all over, too unsteady to speak. And he stays head-down, breathing unsteadily and feeling light-headed.

Laeddis is still clutching onto his friend as if his life depends on it when he feels George’s hand reach out and begin ruffling, uncertainly, through the hair at the nape of his neck. After a moment Noyce hunkers down beside him, hooks his forearm round the back of Andrew’s neck and pulls him into a clumsy embrace. Then he busses him on the cheek and starts blotting his face, thumbs carefully swiping the moisture out of Andrew’s eyes. Laeddis has been so distracted that he hadn't even
realized he's been crying.

To cut down on power bills Mr Myerson has the lights in this part of the building on a circuit that turns them off after a certain amount of time has gone past. They switch off at this moment and once again Andrew and George find themselves clinging to each other in the dark.

“I can guess what you musta’ been thinking,” Noyce is muttering, into Laeddis’ hair. “But I’m not here the same way she was, Andrew – don’t you know that? Dolores - she wasn’t real, and this isn’t how it was - with her. So you don’t got to worry - I’m not gonna leave. I'm not planning on going anywhere.”

TBC
Sunrise

The morning sun wakes them.

The room Laeddis rents, up on the top floor of the boarding house, doesn’t get much natural light at other times of day. But in this respect mornings are good. Outside it’s a bright, blue-sky day; cold and clear but with an underlying chill that comes seeping in through the rickety, single-pane windows and promises in the not too-far distance future, the first of the season’s frosts.

Laeddis and Noyce, wedged together in Andrew’s bed, are tousled from sleep and creased. Andrew’s skin feels grimy all over, from sleeping in his clothes.

He blinks hard, wincing and rubbing his eyes, recalling a memory from the previous night of George, cursing feebly in the dark as he battled to unfasten Laeddis’ shoes.

Because last night - after the stairwell - it was Noyce, surprisingly, who picked up the slack. Laeddis was sick and exhausted and spent. Just then remembered pain and hope - and then the too-recent possibility of dashed hope – running that gamut of emotions had finished him. He only wanted to rest, not to have to move, or to think or doubt any longer – would’ve been content to stay for the time being just as they were.

“Where we heading, Andrew?” he remembers George demanding of him insistently, as they huddled together on the stairs, “gotta – you gotta try’n get your head together. Can’t stay here – you know we can’t! So you better try telling me which one’s your room.”

“You’re coming with me, right?”

“Like you even have’ta ask,” Noyce mutters distractedly, wedging his shoulder under Laeddis’ armpit and doing his best to lever him upright, “all you gotta do is show us the way.”

“There’s nobody lives up here but me,” Laeddis grins feebly. “You too, of course now, Georgie. Just the two of us. Together again, aren’t we?”

“Sure, Andrew,” Noyce says, heaving him over the last step onto the top floor landing. “The gang - sure is - all here. Whatever you say, okay?”

Three paces through the door to Laeddis’ bedsit and Noyce’s shins collide with the edge of the bed. He flops Andrew down onto it and goes to search for the lights as Laeddis lies sprawling on his back in the dark. It’s too much effort for him to even be able to tell George the switch is on the other side over by the door.

Noyce gives up when he can’t find it and after that goes on in near-darkness.

There were waxed paper screens on the windows when he moved in but those fell down in the summer and Andrew, with his mind on other things, never got round to replacing them. Enough of the light from the high city streetlamps, three stories below, makes it up here for him to see by – he can see at least in silhouette, when George bends over him to begin loosening his collar and start unfastening his tie. And by the streetlights he can see Noyce’s breath misting gently out in front of him in the chilly air. Laeddis pulls George’s head down and catches his mouth in a lingering kiss.

“Mmh,” he says to Noyce dreamily. “You got cold lips.”
George pulls away. "You kidding me Teddy? M'freezing out here. There’s no time for this now, okay?"

Laeddis shrugs out of his jacket and under the coverlet, managing to do almost all of that under his own steam.

"You getting in, or what?" he says, holding the blanket open.

George doesn’t need to be asked twice. Shedding his own suit-coat and shoes, he quickly slips in beside him. In the dark Andrew’s hands go groping for him, once again seeking the reassurance that comes with contact, playing his hands over Noyce’s eyebrows, chest and stomach. And he doesn’t mean to start anything just then, he honestly doesn’t, but suddenly of their own accord they’re moving down to George’s groin -

"Not right now, Teddy," Noyce grumbles.

So Laeddis goes to sleep with George’s head tucked upon his shoulder and his hand resting peacefully on Noyce’s hip instead.

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Across the landing from Andrew’s bedsit there’s what in theory is a shared bathroom – but he more or less has sole use of it on account of the hot-water supply up here being sporadic at best, and also because the other half-way house tenants have better things to do than wanting to be bothered trekking all the way to the fourth floor.

Next morning he has to help George, who has more than two day’s growth of stubble and is beginning to look more than a little unkempt, to shave. Laeddis has to help because this morning Noyce’s hands are shaking badly - though his thoughts seem reasonably clear.

They’ve spent so much time shut up in close-quarters together that they’re both accustomed to seeing each other in all sorts of states of undress. So Andrew sits George down to wait on the edge of the ancient roll-top bathtub while he dashes through his own ablutions, using a lukewarm face-flannel at the sink.

Laeddis strips down to his undershirt so he can wash under his arms, leaving his suspenders hanging loosely by his sides. Even without looking he can tell that George is watching him closely – it’s as if he can feel it in the muscles of his back, the weight of George’s stare.

And again, it’s not what Andrew’s been planning. A wave of lust burns through him – an intense sensation that goes shooting straight to his cock. He’s hard and aching before he has a chance to draw his next breath.

It’s not what he’d intended for them. Laeddis woke up warm with Noyce this morning but his bed – which is small, even by Ashecliffe standards – isn’t nearly big enough for two and they didn’t spend the most comfortable night together - although, for the relief of having his friend there, Andrew would willingly forfeit far more than the odd restful night of sleep. His eyes are gritty and he’s still dog-tired so admittedly, even if it’s not the very last thought’s been on his mind, neither is it the first and foremost thing.

This means that when it happens, Laeddis’ own reaction surprises him.

George looks caught-out when Andrew seizes him, drags him to his feet and presses, hard, against him. He takes hold of Noyce’s hand, guides it round to his erection and rubs himself on it, catching George in messy, open-mouthed kisses all the while.
“Jesus, Andrew –“ George gasps, “whaddaya -

Laeddis doesn’t answer. He just keeps kissing his companion eagerly, wraps his free arm round Noyce’s shoulders and hugs him tight to his chest. They stumble the few steps across the bathroom sideways like that – an absurd parody of dance-partners pressing too close – so Laeddis can check the bolt on the door. It’s locked. They stagger back the way and end up half-falling into the empty bath.

Noyce is out of his depth. He starts working his way up the sloping side of the tub so he’ll be sitting rather than laid out flat - this, with Laeddis resting most of his weight on top of him. Andrew shoves himself at him, eagerly trying to buck up against – but the angle Noyce has put himself in, with his buttocks resting neatly in curving corner of the bath turns out to be absolutely no good. Laeddis clambers to his knees, grabs hold of Noyce’s ankles and yanks down on them, pulling him into better position as George, yelping with surprise goes sliding down the water-stained surface. He yelps again when the back of his head bottoms out and clunks loudly against the chipped enamel base.

Noyce blinks up at him and he looks comically indignant, lying there. He had the last of the hot water; his clean-shaved face is smooth and pink, and Laeddis knows that if he bends down to kiss him again, his mouth will still taste faintly of this morning’s toothpaste – applied with Andrew’s toothbrush that George borrowed, and which he was only too happy to lend him. All at once as he’s looking down at his friend Andrew finds himself completely suffused with such a surging feeling of – of warmth towards Noyce, and affection, fondness -

(and it’s probably something a bit like love, really)

That for a moment he can’t even think. Andrew, wonderingly, begins to realize that he must’ve felt this way for a long time, he supposes, it’s just the worry and fear for his friend (and acute mental pain, constant uncertainty and so on) - well, till now those other, troubling, emotions must’ve maybe been - masking it.

He looks down at Noyce, on his back in a rust-streaked boarding-house bath and wonders then, with a tinge of despair, if this is the way it’s always going to be for them, snatching furtive moments together in grubby corners of ramshackle rooms - because this isn’t anywhere close to how he’d hoped it would be. He wants to share his life with him. He knows that now, but always thought – had somehow hoped to be able to provide George, who surely deserves it, with something so much better.

George is still watching him fixedly, wide-eyed, anxious and wearing an expression that makes him very much resemble a frightened, headlamp-dazzled rabbit. Odds are that in the old days back at Ashecliff he would’ve choked, utterly, at this point; any sign of hesitation on Andrew’s part and he’d have gotten himself out of that bathtub directly and gone running for the hills. Present-day Noyce however, doesn’t do that.

Maybe it’s because he’s been different since the operation, slightly altered if not completely different and that’s understandable; possibly on account of lasting side-effects and George still being a little bit....confused. At any rate you can’t fault him for it since after all - whether by means of drugs or through use of wicked surgical instruments - those butcher-shop Ashecliff doctors did set out to deliberately destroy his mind.

To Andrew’s pleasure - and surprise - this Noyce, the one who's here today, makes no attempt to run away. Instead he reaches for Laeddis; starts touching where he was only able to stand and stare before; hesitantly starts running his hands over Andrew’s shoulders, smoothing across his back.

He pulls Laeddis closer - pulls him down, arches his body up to meet him and pushes with his hips.
There’s no mistaking how hard he is and Laeddis knows this is the closest to an explicit invitation he’s ever likely to get from him, given Noyce’s usual sky-high levels of sexual reserve.

George kisses him, sighing against his mouth and closes his eyes.

The flames of Laeddis’ desire, banked but not extinguished, immediately reignite.

They clash for a moment over trouser-buttons; Noyce reaching for Andrew’s at the same time as his friend’s doing the same thing - only to him, and they get themselves caught in an awkward tangle of hands. Next minute Laeddis has George’s slacks dragged down past his hips and his dick pulled out. He strokes it where it’s lying hard and damp against his stomach, causing Noyce to gasp and wriggle breathlessly beneath him. His own erection – Andrew can’t exactly recollect the last time he felt much inclined to touch it, which means it’s also pretty desperate for attention.

Noyce takes a loose-wrapped hold of him and he can’t help but take some time to push himself – thrust after shallow thrust - into his friend’s hand. It’s dry and hurts a bit. There’s too much friction and the short, stabbing movements he’s making chafe but Laeddis can’t bring himself to mind. He’s beyond being unable to stop himself.

What they're doing is far from being sophisticated love-making. Andrew’s terribly excited, heady with anticipation - so much his own hands are shaking now and he feels as giddy and uncoordinated as a teenager. And he keeps getting sidetracked – sidetracked kissing Noyce - squeezing Noyce's ass - licking his throat: so sidetracked that it takes him several failed attempts before – gasping and fumbling - he manages to disengage from George for long enough to get himself lined up with him.

At last they’re sort of in position - so his cock's lined up right on top of Noyce's, but there’s no moisture left in Laeddis’ mouth and he needs – a bit of something, just to help him and tries to spit into his own hand before wrapping it around. But when he gets there he finds that wasn't strictly necessary because George is - Christ, somehow he’s gotten slightly - wet. Now, Laeddis, of all people is well-placed to know this isn't the usual thing for him, to be lying there leaking like a broken spigot - so he reaches round between them and has a feel of his balls, and he's careful as he can be but it still makes Noyce cry out and bite his lips and tremble. Could be it's Laeddis' imagination but is the delicate skin there stretched tighter than usual? They do feel pretty full.

Andrew has to wonder when was the last chance George had to do this. Could it really have been that night with him at Christmas, months and months ago when they were both still patients at Ashecliffe, and talk about saving yourself for someone, but has he really – not - since then -?

And on the slight chance he hasn’t already earned himself a one-way ticket Laeddis is probably going straight to hell for this, because he absolutely shouldn’t find the idea of George, hard, needing release, but not able – or wanting – to masturbate without him being there to be so outrageously arousing -

(This is all very well, but which 'him' is George likely to have been hankering after, though? Him - Laeddis, or what are the chances he's still carrying some kind of a torch for Teddy? And yes, maybe it is odd, to be making comparisons at a time like this, but now it's occurred to him Laeddis can't quite get the thought out of his head; can’t help asking himself which one of them would make George’s dick stiffer; him or Daniels? And, more importantly, who's going to be able to make Noyce come, harder: Teddy? Or him? He's remembering now the way George used to be with Teddy - a bit overawed, also sweet and confiding; the sweet, confiding way he used to come for Teddy and that’s - oh, god, there's definitely something wrong about the way Laeddis feels, thinking about that -)

Andrew shuts his eyes and groans, rubbing his cock against Noyce’s and clenches them both in his
hand, squeezing and twisting his fist. He lets up only to watch when, after not very much of this
treatment, George shudders through a brief, intense orgasm. Maybe that answers one of his
questions. In any case Andrew finds it a pretty satisfying sight and as for his release - well, that’s
another source of lubrication, isn’t it?

That also helps. Lying stomach to stomach with Noyce beneath him is also different to how they’ve
been together before. It’s....more intimate, this position they’re in, and their closeness and some of
the movements Andrew’s making are nearer to what he thinks of as being conventional fucking. He
can easily guess how his friend is likely to feel about that however, so it’s probably another one to
add to the list of hell-worthy concepts: in this case the thought of the desperately helpless expression
George gets on his face when he’s coming; the way he looked less than a minute ago and how great
it would be - what it’d be like between them - if Laeddis was able to make him look like that, at the
same time as he's fucking him -

That thought pitches Andrew headlong into his own climax and he comes, jerking his hips and
gasping George’s name - then collapses on top of him - and afterwards his head’s all over the place.

As the powerful waves of pleasure coursing through him gradually decrease, the first thing Andrew’s
aware of is George’s cheek pressing to the right side of his face - then there’s Noyce’s hand stroking
gently through his hair. George panics and looks caught-out when Laeddis turns his head and smiles
at him, but after only a little hesitation, smiles sheepishly back.

“God, George, I love you,” Andrew tells him sincerely - and he means every word of it, even if he
hadn’t been aware he was planning on telling him that.

Old Noyce felt he’d no choice but to hide his feelings and at this moment would most probably have
–

But then again, who’s to say how old Noyce would’ve responded in the face of such an honest,
heartfelt declaration. There’s an outside - if very real - chance he might’ve reacted the same way as
the present-day version does. Noyce looks up at him shyly and hesitates, and possibly he hasn’t lost
all of his old reticence and instincts, or maybe he’s trying to gauge Laeddis’ reaction. But then he
just says -

“You do, Andrew? That’s swell! ‘Cause you know I love you back.”

TBC
By the time they’ve finished cleaning up for the second time that morning the boarding-house water supply is running completely cold, and Andrew’s wash-cloth is going to require some serious deep-cleaning before it’s once again hygienic and fit for intended use.

Following on from what they’ve been speaking about it might’ve been pleasant for Laeddis and Noyce to have spent some time quietly sweet-talking together afterwards, but it’s a cold hard surface they’re resting on and not exactly conducive for basking in the afterglow. Andrew’s still lying on top of George and knows his weight must be squashing him, because the iron base of the bath is sore against his knees. Reluctantly he picks himself up off him and as he looks on, watching Noyce quietly work a few of the cricks out of his back and his neck, Laeddis finds himself seriously wondering about the possibilities of sensual massage. It’s probably in vain he thinks sadly, as there’s not a very great likelihood of George being open to such an idea.

Today’s the second Saturday in the month, which means Andrew doesn’t have to work. He has the next day, Sunday, off too and with Noyce here now is faced with the dizzying prospect of spending the next forty-eight hours free, unencumbered and on the face of it, without a care in the world.

Laeddis sighs wearily, wondering what it says about him that his new state of being unburdened with stress and anxiety is so strange and unsettling to him that it’s near enough counting as being a separate source of worry all in itself.

The problem is that now the tables have been turned he can’t help but think of Freddie and how frantic she must be: she’s still under the impression her brother’s dead at the bottom of a river, after all. He knows, however, what’ll happen if he tries to make contact: she’ll sweep straight in, an unstoppable force and immediately take or try to take charge. Freddie means well – Laeddis has little choice other than to believe that. But she’s been given some bad information and he doesn’t know her half-way well enough to be able to think of trusting her again with Noyce.

He can’t get away from the fact that he’s going to have to talk to her at some point soon...but for now makes himself mentally gloss over that.

And that’s because for now, him and Noyce are going to take a day – just one day – and they’re going to do their damndest to try and spend it like normal people, simply being together. They’re absolutely not going to think about Andrew’s past or hidden agendas because this is a time out: for maybe twenty-four hours they’re going to forget about lunatic asylums and unscrupulous doctors; neither will they be worrying about mistaken identities, Noyce’s sister or even the shaky foundations of Laeddis’ parole. A bit of respite from those perennial problems is the bare minimum Andrew reckons they deserve after everything that by this stage they’ve both, together and separately, been through. And if it’s short-sighted – well. He’s gotten further with a lot less to go on than this.

A day - that’s all Laeddis is asking. Just one day.

At the outside, maybe two.

Laeddis’ lodgings aren’t a place in which he likes to linger and it’s a beautiful day, out, so later in the
morning they go out to a park. The public gardens are only about a twenty minute walk from the boarding house; he hasn’t been but knows where they are. When they get there he finds them a quiet place down by the boating pond, under a weeping willow tree. It’s not even noon yet but the sun’s already burned off the last of the morning chill and it’s beginning to get humid, and hot. The slender willow branches hang right down to the water all around them and the sweep of long green leaves staves off the worst of the late-summer heat.

It’s a perfect spot. The foliage surrounds them, filling the air with a faint, fresh scent and sways gently in even the faintest breath of breeze. Being behind the curtain of leaves is pleasantly like being sheltered safe inside a green, living tent. They lie down on the grass in their shirtsleeves and for a time they’re quiet together.

At length Laeddis props himself up on his elbows to watch a group of day-trippers ride self-consciously past. They’ve got good reason to be acutely aware of appearances, seeing that the paddle-boat they’re floating on has a gigantic white swan decorating it, riding magnificently astern.

Once the boating party have splashed, laboriously, out of sight he rolls over to face George. “Did you ever play that game in prison?” he says. “When you write down all the things you’re gonna do for definite once you get out?”

Noyce is lying a little way away from him, deep in the shadow of the tree. He’s using his jacket folded as a pillow and looks like he’s fast asleep. “I know it could drive you nuts,” he replies, without opening his eyes. “You could go crazy, thinking too much ‘bout stuff like that.”

“But did you?”

Noyce sits up. “I dunno,” he says guardedly. “I’m pretty sure the only person I might’ve played a game like that with would’ve been - you.”

“An’ - did we?”


Laeddis makes a noncommittal sound because he also doesn’t think so because never, in his more lucid moments, did he ever for a moment believe they were going to let him out of prison - so what would’ve been the point of torturing himself some more like that? But, that said, he can’t remember properly either.

“So what’s top on your list?”

A fellow’s appetites can build up to the point of getting out of hand, in prison, and for most people top of their list usually comes out as being women, and / or some particular type of food. As far as women are concerned however, Noyce isn’t most people and he eats sparingly, too; didn’t quite finish his share of this afternoon’s packed lunch – and admittedly, whilst the canned lunchmeat sandwiches Laeddis made for them, using the last of the bread slices he managed to filch from his boarding-house breakfast might not constitute the most appetizing or gastronomically sophisticated of offerings, Noyce was exactly the same at Ashecliffe – and the food was marginally better there. Most of the time, at any rate.

So odds are with Noyce, it’s not going to be food, or...conventional varieties of sex.

Thinking about this morning in the bathroom and – less-conventional varieties of sex sends a faint throb of arousal down to Laeddis’ groin. The heat must be getting to him - or something - because
it’s just not practical – or feasible – for him to think of wanting to spend all day draped all over George like a rash.  Surrupitiously he reaches down and rearranges himself, clearing his throat.  He tries to think about something else.

“But say we could do anything.  What would you most like to do?”

George considers this for a moment.  Then he comes over to where Laeddis is lying sprawled out on the grass, and peers through the overhanging foliage.  Leaning forwards he points.  In the direction he’s looking at, just beyond the tousled greenery of the park, the top tier of a stacked church steeple rises up against the blue sky.  Laeddis couldn’t say whether or not he’s noticed it there before.  It may be a trick of perspective, but from this angle the church roof seems to stand only just tall enough to clear the tops of the trees.

“See it?”  Noyce says.  “Isn’t that the church on Arlington Street?”

“And?”

“You been?”

Laeddis hasn’t.

“We should!”  Noyce exclaims animatedly.  “Those decorated windows it’s got?  They’re really something.  One or two I ain’t even had a chance to see yet, on account they went in couple or so years after I got put away -”

He wants to go to church?

“Some a’ the pictures – some of the saints an’ all that, OK, so it’s not always been my taste exactly – but the colours an’...an’ execution?  And in the afternoon, the way the light – well, it’s just gorgeous, an’ you can’t help but to admire –“

The substance of what he’s actually saying bypasses Laeddis completely.  “What?” he says, staring at his friend in consternation.  “What, you went an’ caught religion all of a sudden or something?”

Noyce smiles and shrugs his shoulders.  “Not really.”

“So this church – it’s like a confessional –type church?”

George looks perplexed.  “Now you’re asking.  Come to think of it - I don’t know.  I don’t think so.  Could be they’re Unitarians.  I’m not sure what’s the difference.  Methodists, maybe.”

Andrew’s not certain why this should bother him.

Well, that just isn’t true.  It’s not that he has a guilty conscience – he’ll be upstanding and unafraid in the face of The Lord, assuming there is one (although the existence of a benevolent god is a notion that experience and past circumstances have by this point led Laeddis to utterly discard, instead of doubt) and when - or if - his day of judgement should come, he’ll have no problem whatsoever owning up to everything he’s done.

At the same time however, he thinks he knows the way Noyce feels about some of the things the two of them have been getting up to recently: whichever way he looks at it, that seems a pretty inescapable fact.  And now it comes to it he finds he’s incredibly bothered by the notion that Noyce might consider himself to have certain....sinful somethings maybe on his conscience that he feels under obligation to share with his God; to be absolved for or to confess -
“I never saw you once try to go to chapel at Ashecliffe,” Laeddis says to him stiffly, “or when we at Dedham for that matter.”

George stops, surprised by his tone. “Well, I suppose that’s ’cause of I’m not religious.”

“Then what’s the deal with wanting to go to church?”

“I don’t want to go to church,” Noyce replies. “I just thought it might be – kinda nice - to have another look at that one.” He waves his hands in an up-and-down sort of motion, vaguely. “Because of the windows, and – you know – “ and then his voice drops down so he’s speaking so quietly it takes a moment’s hard work for Laeddis to decipher what he’s mumbling –

“Ecclesiastical architecture?” Andrew repeats, not quite believing his ears.

“Yeah,” says Noyce. “Used to be – interesting, looking at how they’d gotten all the – stonework to stay up. Done the ceilings, and such.”

“Flying buttresses?” Laeddis hazards after a moment. “That the kind of thing you’re interested in?”

George nods, not looking at him. “Pretty much, I suppose. Yeah.”

“You being straight with me? This isn’t just another way of saying you want to go have some heart-to-heart with God?”

“An’ what makes you think I’d want to?” George asks, staring at him incredulously. “Say Andrew, what’s gotten into you? You and me both know we - we neither of us - got a lot to say to that guy!”

“You really just want to go look at church buildings?”

“Doesn’t have to be church buildings. Any kind a’ old-time buildings. I just used to like seeing ‘em, that’s all. Yeah.”

Laeddis regards his friend for a moment, struck by a sudden sense of intuition. “You were a college man back in the day, weren’t you Georgie?”

“Well I only did that one term of the first semester,” Noyce tells him, “so I don’t think that hardly counts.”

“What would you of ended up majoring in though, say if you’d stayed?”

Noyce shakes his head and shrugs.

“Would you have liked to be studyin’ architecture, maybe?”

Noyce sighs, smiling ruefully. “Architecture? Betcha my Pa’d have had something to say about that. Who knows though. If things were different maybe I could’ve. I don’t know. Maybe.”

It’s a sobering thought and makes Laeddis feel intensely sad for him. Whatever the rigours of a difficult life have shaped George into, he was once a young man full of hope and promise –

“Don’t look at me that way, Andrew,” Noyce says warningly. “You better just - save your pity, okay?”

“Who said anything about pity!” Laeddis protests. “I was only wondering how come we spent all that time together an’ yet you never said.”
“It’s no big secret,” George replies earnestly, “there’s nothing I got to hide from you Andrew, because you already know all the worst things about me. This – it just never came up.”

“All the worst things,” Laeddis thinks, and if he thought about that some more, maybe he could find it in himself to start feeling more than a little discomfited. But as today’s their day for not worrying about anything he doesn’t push it.

“Well then, what we waiting for?” he says to George warmly. “You wanna hang around in prison another twenty-thirty years thinking about it? Let’s get going already!”

**

So, they go and look at churches. They see the – truly glorious - stained glass windows in the church by the park and then visit the St John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church - and because the Greek Baptists are just across the road from Holy Cross Cathedral they go in and sit a while there too.

And it becomes even more clear, as he walks without a second glance straight past the high altars and sacristries and religious paraphernalia etc., that Noyce really isn’t especially religious, but the way he goes peering up at the vaulted ceilings and interestedly into obscure nooks and crannies does suggest that his enthusiasm for churches genuinely relates to how they’ve been put together and stay standing: the church-type architecture, just as he said.

The doors of the cathedral are open but there’s no service or mass being held just now, and as yet only a few other people are in attendance. Laeddis waits patiently in a pew near the back and watches George walk about, till eventually he’s completed two-and-a-half full circuits round the inside of the church. Afterwards, still flushed with enthusiasm, he comes and sits with him, from time to time pointing out selected special features of the church – details of the spectacularly vaulted ceiling; some choice colonnades - that he thinks it would be worth Laeddis’ while to have a look at.

It’s still afternoon outside. The inside of the cathedral is quiet and full of shadows, with the only light what’s coming in through the stained-glass windows -

(“Gothic Revival Teddy. Nothing too fancy. Just the usual saints and stuff,”)

-and from the distant, flickering altar candles. Laeddis reaches over. Under cover of the wooden pew takes his friend’s hand and holds it in both his own. He’s absently caressing George’s knuckles when Noyce leans against him, and sighs.

It’s only a soft sound, but they’ve got some weird kind of acoustics in here - and it’s hearing a pin drop-quiet in any case - because this, together with the slight scuff and creak of wood as Noyce moves closer to him on the bench are enough to cause a woman who’s sitting two rows nearer the front to turn in her seat and glare over her shoulder at them. She’s wearing spectacles, a sour look on her face, and has on a close-fitting, absurdly flowered hat. Laeddis supposes he has a pretty shrewd idea what she thinks she’s glaring about and meeting her eye, he defiantly returns her stare.

George is perhaps not firing on absolutely all of his cylinders at this point. He doesn’t seem to have noticed.

Probably they’re too much at ease with each other - Laeddis wonders if maybe that’s the thing. When they’re together there’s a closeness to their movements – a type of closeness and familiarity in the way they talk and interact with one another that must exceed the bounds of what these days is considered to be acceptable, revealing more to others than possibly it’s wise for them to.
Laeddis puts a protective arm round Noyce’s shoulders. If it’s how they are together - then he thinks it must be obvious.

And he goes on to worry and wonder about the occasional second looks – divided in approximately equal numbers between amusement and hostility – they’d received from passers-by as they walked, carelessly arm-in-arm in the park earlier in the day. So what if George has occasional bouts of...vagueness? They don’t last long and tend to come and go and it may be that Andrew had to take his arm that morning not only because he wanted to but also to a limited extent - to guide him. And if he did, surely that should be no-one’s business but theirs? Laeddis has no desire or slightest inclination to want to hide. They might have gotten out of hospital, but in their ongoing situation they’re neither of them really free – never will be properly at liberty - to express themselves, or act. So they’ll have to be more careful. He knows that.

They stay where they are, sitting together in the peaceful, silent cathedral, long after the disapproving woman has departed, and stay till the church starts to fill with parishioners arriving for the Saturday evening Vigil. Then they’re out again onto quiet streets still bright with late afternoon sunshine.

The time for Laeddis’ curfew is approaching which means that staying out late is out. Andrew picks up a bit of take-out in lieu of dinner – a couple of hot-dogs for each of them from a stand he knows on Tremont Street. It’s a relatively minor outlay but pretty much depletes Laeddis’ finances for the day so afterwards they head back to his lodgings.

As is often the case at the weekend, this evening Mr Myerson isn’t in attendance. Andrew signs himself in on the register and even has time to hustle George up the indoor stairs instead of having him hide out again on the fire-escape. He doesn’t know whether or not the hostel regulations allow for visitors (or for permanent house-guests) as he’s never had one, but doubts that his landlord would be much inclined to leniency in respect of Andrew putting in a request to share his room.

They go to Laeddis’ room. Laeddis is in the process of making tea - boiling water on his rickety hot-plate, when the unmistakably heavy tread of Mr Myerson’s slipper-shod feet on the staircase outside serves as warning that – most unexpectedly - his landlord is about to pay him a person-to-person visit that’s as unscheduled as it is exceedingly unwelcome.

Andrew opens the door ahead of Mr Myerson having to rap on it, then does his best to stand in just such a way as to block his landlord from having an unobstructed view of the inside of his bedsit.

“Laeddis,” the landlord says, “didn’t hear you come in. Got a party here’s been waiting all afternoon sayin’ she’s gotta talk to you.”

He stands aside on the threshold, making room for the person who’s accompanying him. Mr Myerson is a rather tall and bulky man, whereas Andrew’s visitor, who until now has been hidden out of sight behind him, is not.

Laeddis starts in surprise when he sees her.

It’s Letteice.

TBC.
Mrs Dunlop begins talking right away. She’s worried, has been worried, since she heard that Laeddis left work sick yesterday -

“I hope you won’t consider this an intrusion,” she’s saying, “but after the shock you had I was deeply concerned for you, Andrew dear. After I telephoned yesterday evening your landlord was kind enough to help me by calling in to see if you were in your room -”

(Mr Myerson’s obviously been quite taken with Lettice and puffs his chest up, looking extremely pleased with himself at this point)

“ – but he told me apparently you hadn’t come in as yet, and that that was most unusual, owing to – well, your being under some variety of curfew and so on –” she looks away here, embarrassed -

“which of course is entirely your own business and I’d no intention of prying but honestly, Andrew, I had no idea! In any case I tried to stay away, but as the day went on and there was still no sign of you I began to feel I had no choice but to – “

“That’s all right,” Andrew cuts in wearily, because whichever way he looks at it her arrival here can only mean the game is well and truly up. “It sure was - kind of you, Mrs Dunlop, to want to come and see I was okay.”

Laeddis, and Laeddis’ visitor and landlord all stand around for a moment outside Laeddis’ room.

“I was making tea,” Andrew says to Lettice at last, because it’s the lesser of two evils and neither she nor Myerson are showing any inclination to leave him to his own devices as yet. “You wanna – I mean, would you like to come in?”

After Mrs Dunlop smiles and says ‘that would be nice’ Laeddis holds his door open for her – then has to push it shut on Myerson to block him from following straight in after, as if he’s under the impression that Laeddis and Lettice are in urgent need of being chaperoned.

“If you need anything, Mrs Dunlop, I’ll be waiting here for you, right outside,” he calls to her. Thanking him, Lettice says that’ll be quite all right. “I’ll be sure to look in on you before I go, Mr Myerson,” she replies, in a brisk tone that makes it clear she’ll be brooking no argument. “I’ll come and find you later – downstairs in your office, if you please.”

Myerson, dismissed, wavers for a moment outside before leaving. Laeddis and Lettice listen to his lumbering tread, descending.

Mrs Dunlop’s face falls as she steps into Laeddis’ bedsit. Quite unconsciously she draws her coat tighter round her shoulders, preventing the hem of it from coming into unnecessary contact with any of the boarding house’s fixings.

Laeddis can’t say he blames her. George doesn’t count; he’s thoroughly institutionalized. Noyce has been down and out, and in prison and mental hospital so many years he’s lost all sense of what passes for ‘normal’ and ‘not’ in terms of an ordinary, domestic setting: if you asked him the poor, clueless guy would be able to truthfully answer that he sees nothing wrong with the place. As for Andrew, well, he’s been preoccupied, and didn’t really care – still doesn’t care – about appearances, or where he lays his head. But seen through another – through a regular - person’s eyes, Andrew
supposes his accommodation does come across as being pretty grim.

Mrs Dunlop looks around the room, certainly not aware she’s staring, with a horrified sort of fascination. Laeddis sees her taking note of the scruffy furniture. The meagre collection of canned goods stacked up on one tier of the bookshelf because there isn’t any cupboard-space. The curtainless windows and cracked linoleum – made from two large pieces, one partly overlying the other and neither of which quite reach the wainscotting, with no attempt made to match the different colours, texture or design. Now she’s looking at the collection of water marks that cover the far corner of the ceiling and run halfway down the wall. The rooftop gutter on that side overflowed one night in summer, after getting blocked by hailstones during an exceptionally heavy thunderstorm. It may look bad, but there’s almost no trace of dampness left, at least.

“And this is where you live?” Lettice says. “This is the place arranged for you by the hospital?”

Andrew shrugs helplessly. “Well...yeah.”

“I was under the impression you were being rehabilitated! That you’d been given lodgings in some sort of care-home, or a hostel!”

“This place –“ Laeddis tries not to sound defensive. “It is a hostel.”

“But this won’t do at all! Why, you’ll simply freeze to death in winter, dear!”

Laeddis starts trying to explain that due to his crimes and also taking into account his previous history, there weren’t so many landlords in the city all that willing to provide him with accommodation when it came to the crunch –

Andrew’s room is shaped like a blunt letter ‘L’, part of one of the longer walls having been slightly inset to allow space for the flight of stairs. The shorter leg takes the form of a cramped little alcove on the same side as the door, set at right-angles to the main living area. This is the hiding place to which Noyce wisely retreated when he and Laeddis heard Laeddis’ landlord approaching on the staircase - and he’s still in there, stumbling over Laeddis’ things and generally blundering about.

“That’s just my – my friend, who’s...visiting,” Laeddis explains, in response to Lettice’s inquisitive look.

“George?” he calls over him, “you – you want to come out and say hello to Mrs Dunlop or anything?”

A scuffle and a heavy thump over in the corner of the room tell of Noyce flattening himself against the wall - and probably knocking over something else.

“Yes, he’s – uh, sometimes he gets nervous round new people,” Laeddis tells her.

Mrs Dunlop waves his explanation away. “You needn’t worry, Andrew. It’s you came to see.”

What Laeddis said doesn’t register immediately. When it does he sees Lettice’s eyes widen, and then grow rounder and rounder with astonishment. “Your friend George?” she exclaims. “Oh my goodness! But that can’t be –“

“He only got here last night,” Andrew says. “Says it took him a few days hitching a lift in from Concord.”

“And he knew to come here and find you?”
“He….must’ve done, I guess.”

Lettice stares at him. “Really Andrew, you ought to have made his presence known! Freddie’s frantic.”

“Yeah,” Laeddis sighs. “You said.”

“There’s simply no excuse!”

And there isn’t – Laeddis knows there’s nothing he can say that’s likely to sway her or make sense.

“I was going to call Mrs Warren in the morning,” he tells Lettice, because it’s true. “It’s just – the way things’ve been since the hospital, him and me - we haven’t had a chance to see each other in a real long time. I guess it’s not a proper reason. I guess I know that.”

“We wanted to have some time when it’s just the two of us,” Noyce puts in. He’s quietly emerged from his cubby-hole and has come to stand at Laeddis’ elbow, where he’s currently hovering behind him. Andrew doesn’t know if George means to back him up or is still trying to be in hiding. A bit of both, most likely.

Lettice nods to George, acknowledging him, but doesn’t immediately reply. She’s too busy thinking. “I suppose - in a way,” she says at last, “Freddie has every reason to be beholden to you.”

“To me?” Andrew says sceptically. “You think?”

“Well! I mean to say, you’ve found her long-lost brother for her twice now, haven’t you?” Lettice gives Laeddis a searching look, which she then directs at Noyce, looking from one to the other and back again. The smaller one, the scared-looking little mouse of a man is Freddie’s brother. It’s been a tempestuous relationship: there’s a history of intimidation and violence between him and Laeddis - or so Lettice has been told, although she would never have guessed it from the way he’s been sticking close to Andrew like a shadow, throughout. Now Laeddis has started pressing back against him and it looks for all the world almost as if they’re leaning on each other, for support.

Freddie’s brother – George – meets her gaze briefly, before he colours up looking stressed and panicked, and nervously ducks his head. Then Andrew murmurs something; words indistinct, but in a tone that’s soft and soothing and it’s not lost on Lettice that whatever Laeddis is saying to him appears to have helped. She can’t see that George appears to be in any immediate danger – quite the reverse, in fact. This is perplexing: not at all the type of interaction that Mrs Dunlop has been told she should expect.

“I suppose,” Lettice continues, “I suppose if I hadn’t happened to come along this evening - which I very nearly didn’t, nobody would have been any the wiser, would they? Still, the fact remains that someone’s going to have to tell Freddie.”

It’s their last chance and Laeddis leaps on it. “Can it wait until the morning?” he pleads, because he isn’t above pleading these days, not when Noyce is concerned.

“It can’t,” Lettice says resolutely. “But, if I have your word that you’ll talk to Freddie tomorrow, I think, for the present, I’ll be able to – to stave her off. Now, would that be enough time for the two of you to catch up?”

Not really, Laeddis thinks, but what other option has he got?

“That’s good of you,” he says to Lettice. “And I want you to know I really appreciate what you’re trying to do here. So – so if you’re gonna let Mrs Warren know that George is okay, please tell her
I’ll call and speak to her first thing.”

TBC
After the visit

George isn’t sure who’s the elderly lady just came up to see them. She doesn’t seem familiar but Laeddis obviously knows her and – as he’s all too aware – he’s prone to not remembering an awful lot of important stuff, these days. What is obvious, however, is that her visit’s turned out to be yet another source of worry for Andrew, because ever since she left his friend’s been anxious; worrying himself sick.

Laeddis is sitting with his face in his hands and his elbows on his knees, hunched over on the bedsit’s one, ratty armchair. He’s been sitting there for so long it’s starting to get dark.

Noyce gets up, wondering if – assuming he gets to stay here – they might think of bringing in a second chair someday because, apart from the bookshelf and a low, battered coffee table, there isn’t any other furniture in Andrew’s bedsit to speak of. Up until now, he’s been sitting perched awkwardly on the edge of Laeddis’ bed. After a moment of dithering and indecision he gets up and switches on the bedside lamp. Then he goes and sits, perching awkwardly on the arm of Andrew’s armchair instead.

Immediately Laeddis’ arms go right round, hugging him. Now he’s sitting with his arms round Noyce and his face buried in Noyce’s side, shoulders hitching as he draws in each sharp, unsteady breath.

Noyce might be hazy on the details of what exactly is upsetting Andrew, but the position they’re in remains familiar to him from all those times they were in hospital and he knows that when Laeddis gets like this, it’s never a good sign. The problem has something to do with his sister – sure, George understands it’s about his sister – but he’s pretty certain he can remember climbing out a window and running for it. That means he’s gotten clean away from Freddie, hasn’t he? He squeezes his eyes shut, wishing he could remember why, in that case, she’s still part of the picture - but his friend’s behaviour is unsettling and just now it’s difficult for Noyce to focus on even one thing at a time. The whys and wherefores of whatever it is they’re facing continue to evade him.

Andrew may be worrying unnecessarily, but either way it’s not good for him to sit and brood like this. That much George does remember, at least. He tries to think of something to say that’ll take his mind away from thoughts of Freddie, too.

“You know –“ he begins, “you know in the park? When you said about that list in prison? About all the stuff you’re gonna do when you get out.”

Laeddis looks up. His face is red and crumpled, creased with lines from being pressed up tight to Noyce’s shirt. “Yeah, George?” he says, in a voice that comes out sounding awfully thick and congested, “what about it?”

“So – so how come we spent the whole afternoon trailing round church after church an’ yet you never said what’s the thing you wanted?”

Andrew gives him an odd, lopsided smile. “Well, that’s ‘cause we did it already.”

George nods to himself. Well of course he has! Why, Laeddis left prison....see, the problem is, objective estimates of time passing have come to be a bit of a tricky subject for Noyce – what with the psychotropic / antipsychotic drugs they’ve had him on, not to mention the brain surgery that came
before, which means he can’t tell how long it’s been exactly. But it must have to have been months, now. Months and *months*.

“Yeah?” Noyce says, stalling as he tries to figure out the timescale. “I bet you have! I guess I wasn’t remembering you been out a long time already.”

“Yeah,” Laeddis nods. “It’s been a while. Sure feels that way most of the time, too.” Other than that he’s not forthcoming, so after a moment George prompts him.

“Okay then, so...what did you do?”

Laeddis leans back and sighs, regarding him with a long, serious look. “Only thing I had on my list was I wanted to be with you, Georgie. And I was, today, all day - so I guess we’ve done that already.”

Noyce searches his face, half-expecting there’s going to be some kind of smart-alecky punch-line in the offing because – George’s feelings for Andrew notwithstanding, how likely is it really for ‘oh, I wanted to spend time with you, George!’ to begin to figure, let alone come out top on another person’s wish-list? He waits, but a punch-line doesn’t come.

“It’s just I was hoping we could do it over again tomorrow,” Andrew tells him, “then the next day and the next day – and after, maybe on and on forever, that’s all.”

Noyce blinks at him. Now it’s his turn to not reply.

“Not much to ask, is it?”

“It isn’t?”

“When it comes to you and me? Nah. I don’t think so. But, tomorrow, your sister –“

Yes, now Noyce remembers and now he does, how could he have ever forgotten about ‘tomorrow’ and ‘his sister’? Not when Laeddis and the old lady both took such pains to explain the situation - and were so careful to arrange -

His chest feels full and tight with emotion. He’s fuming – whether at Freddie for interfering, or at the way Andrew’s simply rolling over in the face of it – he can’t properly explain.

“This is it, then? Tonight, then that’s it? We have to say goodbye again? Say ‘so long’ to each other for good this time?”

“Jesus, George, I don’t want that either! But maybe – maybe this time your sis’ will let me come see you. Maybe she’ll change her mind an’ let me - visit. At least that’d be *something*, wouldn’t it?”

“Uh-huh. Sure she will,” Noyce says bitterly, “dream on.” He’s keyed up, so confused and anxious he can’t say for sure what he’s feeling - but knows he has to do something, so he leans forwards and rests his hands on Laeddis’ chest, one either side over his ribs. He leans further forwards; leans in and kisses him.

Andrew pulls away at first, frowning. “George? What’s gotten into you?”

“If it’s really goodbye don’t you think we oughta tell each other properly? Not as if we had much chance before.”

“You mean like – like in the hospital?”

“Yeah, in hospital,” Noyce replies, nodding fiercely. “All those times we knew for sure we
wouldn’t be seein’ each other again in hospital. Or Dedham prison. What’s the difference?"

And then Laeddis is grabbing for him and kissing him back: deep, open-mouthed kisses, tinged with desperation. His face is damp and his eyelashes are wet and that confuses George for a moment until he realizes his friend is crying, crying even as he’s kissing him.

Seeing the single-minded Laeddis who’s never, even at his most painfully misguided, had any trouble thinking his way around a problem at his wit’s end like this – well. That’s enough to take the wind right out of George’s sails.

“Andrew,” he begins, “it’s not so bad. I - I promise we’re gonna be OK. It’s gonna be all right. It’s gotta be.”

“If you say so,” Laeddis replies tiredly. He slumps back in his armchair, looking exhausted, and shuts his eyes. He looks woebegone: anguished and completely resigned to his fate – it’s as if, following Lettice’s visit, the last of the fight’s finally been wrung out of him.

No, Noyce’s little pep-talk wasn’t much as pep-talks go so it’s no great surprise it doesn’t seem to have worked. On the other hand, apathy isn’t something that’s ever featured very highly on the Andrew Laeddis list of defining character traits and George isn’t sure he’s entirely buying this dying-swan act. His friend is tired, that’s all, and it’s true what they say – things are gonna look better in the morning. Only problem is they’ve a long night to get through before it’s morning and that’s the thing he’s going to have deal with, first.

“C’m’ere, T’ – Andrew,” George mutters, taking his friend by the arms and pulling him upright. He guides the taller man across the room to his bed and pushes him onto it. “You look all-in. Why don’t’c’ha lay down and rest a minute, okay?”

Laeddis grabs hold of Noyce’s hand, entwining their fingers together, and doesn’t let go. So, Noyce sits down on the bed beside him, sighing as he reaches over with his free hand to undo Laeddis’ tie and then the top buttons of his shirt.

Andrew shuffles sideways, making room for him. “Stay with me?”

George raises an eyebrow, sceptically.

“You said yourself we’d to rest. It’s not like m’gonna try anything.”

Noyce ‘hrmphs’- but kicks his shoes off and then gingerly lies down. They lie in silence for a minute.

“You still miss him?” Laeddis says, suddenly.

As George is only too well aware, up to half of his own headspace – or more – could easily be away with the fairies at any given moment. Some habits, however, have become much too deeply ingrained for him to be able to ignore. “Not sure I get what you’re talking about, Andrew,” he hears himself answering. “Him - who?”

“Teddy Daniels,” Laeddis says, coming straight out and saying it like it’s nothing. “Nearly went and called me his name a minute ago, didn’t you? Teddy Daniels. That’s who.”

“Did I?” George answers, maybe a bit disingenuously. “M’sorry. Didn’t mean to.”

“There’s no need to be sorry - not when it’s just you and me. Go on – if you miss him you can say.”
“What do I need to go missing that guy for?” Noyce insists and finds, somewhat to his surprise that it’s true. He’s not in the habit of thinking of Andrew and Teddy as being interchangeable, and yet –

“We both know he’s gone, Andrew,” he says, “and anyhow, I still got you. For crying out loud – you’re laying right here front of me!”

“But don’t’c’ha –“

“’But’ nothing,” George insists, regarding Andrew seriously. His friend’s eyes are wide, red-rimmed, with the pupils almost all the way dilated, looking huge.

“That guy’s gone already, hasn’t he?” Noyce repeats, creeping closer. “But the two of us – we made it through, don’t c’ha see? We’re still here, just the way you said. Just me - an’ you.”

This time it’s the easiest thing in the world for George to move in on him again. Andrew doesn’t resist, his mouth staying soft and pliant under Noyce’s lips and as he kisses back, his eyes flutter closed.

There’s another interval of silence. Neither of the two men say anything, but time is passing and they’re not exactly lying quietly together.

“Thought you said I wasn’t to try anything,” Laeddis says, a bit breathlessly, at length.

“Yeah? Well, see, I guess that’s okay,” Noyce retorts bashfully, ducking his head. “’Cause you’re not.” He’s no idea how it’s happened, but tonight he’s found himself setting the pace, for once.

Maybe it’s because there’s no rush – been nothing to spook Noyce, or for him to be afraid of. Laeddis, at the end of his tether is quiet, and he lets George take his time. Lets him take the lead and - it’s nothing like Noyce has been expecting.

He kisses Andrew in the glowing lamplight – lingering kisses on the mouth at first, then over the faint shadow of stubble on his jaw. Later roaming all the way down his throat because – from the way he tilts his head back, catches his breath and stretches - it’s obvious he wants Noyce to do it there, too.

They break apart and Laeddis only glances up at him uncertainly before he starts struggling, awkwardly, out of his shirt, which catches across his shoulders when he tries to hoist it over his head. He has less trouble with his singlet and a moment later is lying back on his with a feverish look in his eyes, half-undressed. Noyce knows he’s not demanding or even asking him for anything, really, but he can also see his friend is perhaps remaining – hopefully expectant.

And George desperately doesn’t want to disappoint. He thinks he can do this – tells himself he ought to be able to do it and steeling himself, pushes one leg over his friend’s hips, scrambling up till he’s more or less straddling him. There’s a spilt second of blind panic after he’s placed himself in this vulnerable new position, but George is steadfast and keeps his nerve. He manages to keep it together - everything’s more or less going okay right up until the point when Laeddis starts heaving and shifting fitfully under him, and his movements possibly have more purpose than Noyce at first appreciates, because not long after and his friend’s somehow managed to wriggle himself half-way out of his trousers, too.

On the one hand Noyce knows it’s wrong – but on the other, when have they had an opportunity to really be alone together, before? There’s no-one sneaking around spying or eaves-dropping, or on the point of walking in on them at any minute, and George can’t help but steal a quick look.
Andrew’s on his back with his eyes closed; lying there naked apart from his pants - which are hanging half-mast, twisted round his ankles, his shorts and, incongruously, a much-mended pair of socks. And maybe the sight ought to be comical - but to Noyce it’s emphatically not. Laeddis’ erection, hard and upstanding, is outlined clearly through the thin fabric of his briefs with just the rosy-coloured tip jutting out past the elastic beside his navel….and Noyce finds he absolutely can’t look away. He feels a blush run all the way through him, from the top of his scalp down to the tips of his toes.

But George has been pushing his luck. He’s gone too far – should never want to look at another man like this, and is struck with a sudden vivid memory of those therapy sessions back when he was a kid, and what Dr Szadz, the head-shrink hired by his parents intended for him to think. It’s a lesson that at one time he’d learned very well because of course the proper reaction is to be terrified, and repulsed.

Must be he freezes up or something, because the next thing Noyce knows is his head’s buried in Laeddis’ shoulder while Laeddis clutches hold of him. He’s speaking to Noyce in a low voice, urgently - really going all-out to reassure him.

“Hey. Hey, Georgie,” he’s saying, “it’s okay. It’s all right if you don’t wanna. It’s fine by me, honestly - we can stop right here! We don’t haveta.”

He’s being straight with him – Noyce can hear from his voice he means every word he’s saying, and it’s enough to help him to lift his head take another look. The warm lamplight is kind to Laeddis, providing a gentle disguise for the grey in his hair, smoothening the lines of care and worry from his face - and George’s heart twists with emotion as he looks at him. Yes, the correct response might be for him to be terrified and repulsed, but the thing is George doesn’t find Andrew terrifying, or repulsive at all.

Noyce shuffles the blankets right up over his back, bringing them both comfortably under the covers. There isn’t anyone around to see, but he feels better – away from prying eyes, here.

The way the two of them are lying, their faces are only a few inches apart. Noyce blinks anxiously, having completely lost the thread of what he’s supposed to be about. He tries shifting his hips a little bit, but all that does is leave him squirming uncoordinatedly, right on top of Laeddis. His friend squints up at him. “George? What’cha – whaddya think you’re doing?”

“George?” Laeddis repeats doubtfully, and then with rather more urgency - as, more by happenstance than design Noyce succeeds in hitting his mark: “Jesus - George! You even know how this is supposed to go?”

Noyce bites his lip, nodding absently. “Sure. I….been around. Seen stuff.”

“You been around? Where you think you’ve been, exactly, Georgie?”

For a moment Noyce is stumped. “Prison, I guess,” he answers, at length.

“Prison?” Laeddis jumps on that so quickly it’s like he’s been trying to catch Noyce out. “Didn’t you say to me in prison you never –“

“What about it?” George replies. “All those years an’ I did what you’re s’posedta - kept my eyes on the wall an’ tried not to listen to – whatever. But if two guys’re getting together an’ the bed’s they’re in’s - right there – maybe I couldn’t help getting a good idea what’s going on.”

“Huh! You did, did’ja?”
“Mm-hmm,” Noyce answers emphatically – but less than two seconds later gives the lie to what he’s just said when he begins floundering uncoordinatedly in place some more.

His mind’s a total blank - he’s got nothing. It’s embarrassing, how patient Laeddis is being with him - and frustrating, because Jesus – but his dick’s gotten hard and there are things Noyce would like to - but doesn’t know how to do, and…it’s not long before he’s run out of steam. Humiliated – that’s what he’d be, if hadn’t already fallen past that point so utterly it’d only be visible as a miniscule speck on the distant horizon, that’s how far Noyce reckons he’s left humiliation behind. No, he’s not humiliated - he’s miserable; wretched; abject; here he is with the one man, the only guy he’s ever – and he’s a screw-up. Already proving himself to be such a useless waste of space he can’t even begin to -

“Here,” Laeddis tells him, abruptly breaking in on Noyce’s downward-spinning spiral. “Maybe you oughta just – c’m’ere, Georgie. Let me.”

So, in the end Andrew helps him - of course that’s what he does. Laeddis’ hands are warm as he sets about undressing George, warm careful and confident. He leaves his clothes on for the main part – an astute move, given Noyce’s current mental state, so: strategic areas of unfastening. That’s all Andrew goes for. Later followed up by a little laying-on of hands: Laedis slips his fingers through the gaps he’s made in George’s shirt and his slacks and onto George’s skin; sends them sliding over his collarbone - the sides of his neck – the small of his back; reassuring him with unseen, caressing touches.

Even then Noyce takes a while to come round to the idea. He takes so long in fact that he feels he really ought to be making it up to Laeddis in some way for how bad he is at reciprocating, because much of what his friend is encouraging Noyce is nowhere near comfortable with as yet. There’s not so much a little bit of disconnect between what he wants and what he’s capable of as (what seems to George to be at this point) a yawningly huge, uncrossable chasm; but there isn’t a lot that either of them can do as a quick-fix to remedy that. Laeddis, however, doesn’t complain. Noyce might start to panic but as always Laeddis steadfastly refuses to give up on him - and they go on in this way until eventually they reach a compromise: although it’s Noyce who’s in theory taken the lead, Andrew keeps close at hand to steady and to guide him. And that’s how they end up working it out. Working together they manage to get the thing figured out to their mutual satisfaction.

By the time the kissing starts - or resumes, because strictly speaking it probably counts as a continuation of the kissing that went on earlier - there isn’t much to choose between them. Laeddis is tangled in the bed-sheets - shaking, sweating, far-gone; George is close behind, feeling equal parts bemused and thrilled at being the one who’s done that to him; and if he fluffs his initial approach, landing the first of his kisses more in the region of Andrew’s chin than on his mouth – which at the time was open, and gasping breathy variations on the theme of George’s name with such yearning lust and longing that part of the blame must surely rest on Laeddis, for setting himself up so effectively as a distraction - it doesn’t matter because suffice to say that Laeddis, well, he seems to like – seemed to really like – the idea of Noyce kissing him at the point of orgasm like that.

George is inexperienced, and if he didn’t quite realize what was happening at the time that’s the reason, and aside from previous experiences with Laeddis - which in the heat of the moment he can only grasp at as fleeting, half-remembered memories - he has little clear idea what to expect. There’s not much for him to go on based on his own reactions either, because the very thought of sex puts Noyce in dangerous territory, where guilt, shame and a slew of other distressing emotions are always waiting to waylay him, discouraging him from the outset. None of this long-ingrained negativity seems to apply, however, to Laeddis. So it’s all right when Andrew pushes George’s hands down and holds them still and rubs on them, and later, when Andrew, in a haze of passion hooks one leg round his hips and then starts pressing, forcefully, back against him the only thing that occurs to
Noyce to think of is maybe he should kiss him – so he does it, and the outcome is somewhat more than he’s been anticipating.

Inexperience aside, Noyce hasn’t been able to avoid hearing talk here and there, about these kinds of things, so he’s especially surprised when that badly-aimed kiss - and its follow up - turn out to be the point of his own orgasm, too. He comes about the same time Andrew does, with his friend bucking and heaving beneath him, flopping and squeezing against their interlaced hands, and releases himself messily, all over Laeddis stomach.

Noyce lies in a daze on his side, afterwards, feeling swamped by an awkward mixture of emotions that veer between complete exhilaration - and being absolutely appalled by what they’ve just done. He’s out of excuses; knows he went into it this time not as a passenger but with his eyes open, as an equal and active participant. At the same time as he’s teetering right on the brink of another neurotic episode George can’t help being distracted from it, once again by the thought of Laeddis; how he’d acted; the way he looked - and the equally distracting realization that he, George, lying here in pleasant – yet also keen-edged - afterglow has never really done that to a man before. In spite of himself his thoughts keep circling back to one point; the growing conviction that what he and Andrew just did? Well, it felt – pretty great, actually.

Laeddis, seeming quite matter-of-fact and not even a little bit perturbed by the amount of…stuff… that’s ended up on him has been cleaning himself down with his handkerchief. When he’s finished he rolls over so he’s facing Noyce and smiles fondly at him. Then he leans in and kisses him. Noyce, making an embarrassingly sappy noise, kisses back and shuts his eyes.

That must mean they’re good, for the time being. Noyce dearly hopes that them being good will last long enough – at least to get them through the night.

TBC.

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