

# Chapter 47

## EPILOGUE – REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS

**“W**HEN I WOKE up...”

No, that wasn't right. I backspaced over it.

*When I awoke?*

Too formal.

*When I regained consciousness?*

Better—precise, and rich with meaning. Regain: to acquire for the second time. Consciousness: awareness, knowledge, clarity.

*“When I regained consciousness...”*

Too clinical. I wiped it out. Sometimes the precise words aren't the right words.

*When I came to?*

I pushed back from my laptop. The table it was on was sleek-teak Danish modern, though the village I'd holed up in was in Norway. Probably Georg Jensen. Raymond would approve.

It felt like I'd been working on the letter for an aeon. In fact I'd only started after lunch. It must have been the days beforehand mulling over what to say.

I stood and stretched and went out on the gallery. The Sognefjorden down below was fabulously blue. A cruise ship was emerging from the cleft between two mountains like a dollop of the winter snow retreating up the slopes.

Months ago, I'd shared a joint with Axel on Cassandra Island's

dock. The giant blond had spoken of his home, not fifty kilometres from my suite at the Kviknes—the hotel in Balestrand, magnet for the famous since the nineteenth-century. Kaiser Wilhelm was a frequent guest. They'd even kept his dining chair.

*We could go anywhere*, I'd said to Luke, *do anything*. Facing the decision on my own, I'd chosen north. Crisp and clean and rugged. Far removed from anything I knew. My only link to Norway was the recollection of a Nordic Titan's thighs.

My eyes went up the truly verdant mountainsides, utterly unlike the Coleman-frosted green I'd woken to two seasons and a world away.

Woken to.

Regained consciousness.

Gain entails an increase.

Perhaps it was the right expression after all.

As his self-control collapsed, Luke had filled me with—in Mr. Shen's words—genuine mnesic artefacts. The real deal. Authentic shared experience, not digests with the juicy bits left out. And more than just the things we'd done together; incidents I hadn't been around to witness, too.

A gain.

No one had imagined I'd be present at Luke's death. Dr. Colton's "psychogenic neural overstimulation" was supposed to have been lifted by my learning of it—if, that is, anyone had sought me out to tell me. By taking his own life instead of waiting out the tumour that would kill him anyway, Luke himself removed the tripwire thwarting reassembly of my six years at the Farm. With his gift of real memories as landmarks on the way, I could start along the path of reconstruction on my own. I didn't need the hieroglyphs of Mr. Shen's last journal—though, admittedly, they made more sense as time went by and helped a lot.

It took as long to piece things back together as it had to break them up. Some bits flowed together smoothly. Others were more difficult, especially the information gleaned from Dr. Colton. Open-reading of him meant that, as my memories came back, part of him became a part of me.

Another gain.

I went inside and poured a shot of ice-cold *akevitt*. I'd deal with the waking issue later. What mattered now was wrapping up the chronicle of Luke and David Ase.

"Luke was right," I typed, "Dr. Colton didn't lie, but neither did he tell the truth. Misdirection gets to be a habit when a portion of your mind is always doing it, I guess.

"His version of my last night at the Farm began with me in hiding under the veranda, reading Garrett Finnestad while Luke kept him distracted.

"'Distracted' seriously whitewashed what was really going on. Luke was going down on him.

"Dr. Colton had been harbouring suspicions about Garrett for a while. 'Harbouring suspicions' may sound odd—you'd think an em-path would be sure—but even lovers who can sense what's in each others minds keep secrets, even to the point of keeping secret about keeping them.

"The morning after Garrett's death, when Dr. Colton made me read him, he was barely holding on. His lover had just died, a man he'd known for decades. If that weren't bad enough, he now had proof the same man had been messing with a minor—a ward of his, at that.

"For himself, Dr. Colton had grown fond of me, and entertained the notion of a sexual encounter. The context was all wrong, though, so he'd saved it for his fantasies and kept his pants zipped up. Seeing Luke in Garrett's mind, blowing him, brought Dr. Colton's well-suppressed desires to the fore, arousing him and wracking him with guilt he wouldn't otherwise have felt.

"Grief. Betrayal. Guilt. Small wonder open-reading of him left me shell-shocked. Even now, my first few weeks with Mr. Shen remain a blur. Mostly, I remember missing Luke. *Fiercely* missing him.

"There was more on Dr. Colton's plate. When I confronted him with Project #412, he'd waved it off as mere conjecture, a possibility he'd given up on decades prior to the advent of two brothers having mirror psychic gifts. Not true. Empathy-enhanced imprinting

through telepathy had always been his Grail. Amongst other things, its existence would oblige the SPR in Britain to revise its stance on US research into psychotronic weaponry. He'd never gotten over their dismissal of his fears. The very thing he'd hoped for was at last within his grasp, precisely at the moment he was forced to give it up. Added to his turmoil, then, was crushing disappointment.

“And, of course, his horror.

“As a consequence of their ability to imprint states of mind, transmitters can develop psychopathic tendencies. The world revolves around them, so it seems, since everyone responds to their emotions, needs and wishes—voiced or not. Thus they have no motivation to acquire compassion.

“On the reverse side of the coin, empaths have a tendency to moral disengagement—a consequence of their ability to grasp, to *understand*. Their sympathy can lead them into ‘going along with things’. Passing judgment’s hard when you’re attuned not just to feelings, but their origins as well.

“Dr. Colton hoped that our propensities would cancel out each other, or, at least, encourage checks and balances. And who knows? They might have were it not for our telepathy.

“The candle to my moth, in Dr. Colton’s words, was always Luke’s excitement. What he didn’t specify was *sexual* excitement.

“What he ‘saw’ in Garrett’s mind was Luke fellating Garrett for the purpose of initiating wanton play designed to get our rocks off. Don’t forget—Dr. Colton open-read me after I read him, and learned that we’d been jerking off throughout the whole affair. Empathy-enhanced imprinting turned us on in ways we couldn’t fight—and didn’t want to once it started.

“The measures he and Mr. Shen decided on so quickly were the only ones they could have taken. That Luke himself, in time, agreed provided vindication. He wasn’t putting up a front, accepting his captivity—which, in the end, was relatively light considering the danger it was meant to hold. He fully understood that if we’d stayed together, nothing could have stopped us from repeating what we’d done. It feels odd to say it, but the Caucus did its best to be compassionate.”

Nearly done. Suppertime was getting close. *Middag*, as they called it here. A good one came with lots of boiled potatoes and a pile of rutabagas.

“The story has a postscript. As I’ve mentioned, Luke, in dying, passed on memories of his own—the hardest to unravel since so many *almost* fit with what I knew. Or rather, ‘learned’ as the transparencies of memory slipped back in place, to use an image borrowed from the clever Mr. Shen.

“Luke had always meant our game to end in Garrett’s death. He presented it as just another chance to blow our wads because he didn’t want me knowing what he planned, nor why. Empaths can keep secrets from each other; so can telepaths.

“What Luke was hiding was the truth behind his ‘childish lie’, the one of sexual abuse that Dr. Colton couldn’t quite dismiss.

“For nearly three years Garrett had, in fact, been raping Luke, threatening to do the same to me if he told anyone. Luke had finally stood up to him—what Dr. Colton had believed was he and Garrett “having words”. Garrett, a much bigger man, just laughed and took him anyway, murmuring the while I’d be next.

“Ironically, the blow job Dr. Colton thought was Luke seducing Garrett—cold-bloodedly, so we could get our rocks off—was Luke’s start to ending a much colder sexual psychopathy. Garrett didn’t botch the turn that flipped him in the ditch; Luke had rigged the tractor. What he hadn’t counted on was Garrett being pinned, not crushed, and living long enough to tell the tale, so to speak.”

My stomach growled. Reindeer steak tonight—I’d checked at lunch. It came with lots of gravy, which was doubly good because Norwegians frowned at butter on potatoes. Afterwards, I’d spend the evening tweaking what I’d written, then tomorrow, generate a pdf and have the front desk print a copy.

But for now, I scrolled back to the top and, in the way of things, re-read the opening.

“*Dear Ferko,*” it began, “*I had a brother...*”