

The Perfect Whisper

April 13th 1977

Cold war rages,

Pentagon hasn't been empty in years.

Two hundred feet of reinforced concrete and bedrock above our heads, an armored door, and thirty soldiers waiting outside.

The air was a stale, recycled soup, a single overworked vent belching a tired groan as the analog clock on the wall sounded off.

Five men at the massive slate table—a presidential pin, a marine general's uniform, a lab coat, an Armani suit.

And me.

A black box the size of an old telephone booth rested in the center of the table. The cavernous concrete space was claustrophobic as its magnitude compressed me down in my chair.

The general stepped from his purple roller chair, walking forward to the obsidian podium in front of the flickering projector, a silver eagle emblazoned with the name "Gene Hox" latched to his broad chest did little to distract from his leathery face.

I knew the name, *The Mutant*, they called him behind closed doors. Rumor is he took a land mine to the face in Korea; no surgery could fix that look, even if he didn't refuse reconstructive procedures. Hox's hatred for the Commies, the Chinese, the Koreans, even his former commanders, hell, everyone with a pulse who distracted him from his work, was well noted in his file.

I clicked my pen in time with my nervous heartbeat.

Why am I here?

Sure, I was FBI, but not the macho save-the-world type. I spent most of my time taking down crappy snake oil salesmen in Tulsa. Hell, before this, the furthest I'd been into the Pentagon was the gift shop.

I turned to the man beside me—Darren Prote. I'd inched my chair away from him the fourth time he'd tried to discuss my nonexistent stock portfolio, but boredom got the better of me.

Before this I'd only seen him in billboards and tax audit reports, but from what I've observed, he was a poodle of a man—every hair groomed, big-brained, and haughty as a ribbon-clipped show dog. He spun impatiently in the leather roller chair, his spotless Italian loafers scuffing the slate floor with the sound of dying violins and deader cats as he twirled.

"Janus, West Virginia," General Hox announced.

I'd obviously never heard of it, *not that I was a cosmopolitan kind of guy*. His meaty thumb crushed the clicker, and the projector flickered to life, bathing the dim room a harsh, clinical cyan as a small, soot-covered town populated the PVC screen.

"A coal town. Been barren as a nun for fifteen ye—"

"Praise God, he finally speaks, thank god we have the Pentagon on the case, after—" Prote's sarcastic tone sickened as he checked his watch. The small hand had moved a tick since our arrival. "We've waited for an hour. I swear if you dragged me here for some Appalachian mining collapse, NarTech's legal team will have you selling off Delaware for scrap metal."

General Hox let out a low, weary groan, his gaze focusing on the brooding, hulking marine in Kevlar tactical gear standing by the wall.

"Billionaires, Damn parasites, why couldn't Lynda Cara have owned that mine?" Hox muttered. "Private Roane, flick the opacity switch. Enlighten these gentlemen why we're here."

My hands were sweaty as every reason I could be here swamped my mind.

Only one was worth the summon.

The black one-way glass of the crate in the center of the table began to fade its black obscurant, revealing...well—Something?

It was purple— I think. It wasn't orange or green or red or any color you'd seen a thousand times, but something new, a shade undecided and pulsating with every tick of the analog clock.

An almost perfect sphere on a curved pedestal, not cueball-perfect, not globe-perfect, but almost perfect.

Did I love it? love it like I used to love before?

It's just a rock, Michael. A cold, purple rock, it's not like last time.

President Cane shot up quick for a man his age.

“What in the Sam Hell is that? My approval ratings are in the shitter, and now you want me to deal with a magic-space pumpkin! Explain yourself, General, or I’m back to Camp David.”

THUD—No one turned as the weaselly-looking scientist fainted on the floor, his greasy hair falling in soaked tufts next to his snapped glasses. We all just stared at the uncanny perfect purple sphere at the room’s center.

A thin viscous sheen dripped down into the grated floor of the pedestal. It was hermetically sealed, surely, yet I began to smell something sweet yet salty, bitter yet smooth.

I inhaled harder this time.

“What is it?” I spoke but didn’t dare turn to face Hox.

—Click—

General Hox wielded the remote in his hand. A graphic emerged from the screen.

“Janus, West Virginia population 326, town more inbred than a Habsburg family reunion. It got one thing special, though. Gentlemen, I present the Chrysalid.”

Roane flicked the switch back on, and the orb disappeared back into its veil, our spell finally broken.

I was hollow for a moment, then turned to the graphic.

A grainy aerial photo, had all the trimmings of a mining town; big mining shafts, bigger bars.

“Had two boys go missing, family said it was a preacher man in Janus responsible, figured it some old Appalachian feud, so we sent in the cavalry.” he turned to the bulky marine beside him, “Big boy was in the old church house, whole gowd damm town tried to claw out our boys' eyes.”

Roane's eyes were solemn. "Had to put 'em down, Sirs," His voice broke, and he covered his face, "Alls of 'em."

The marine's eyes grew purple with what must have been the orb's glow.

–click–

The image changed. Dead on the pews, corpses by the altar, blood flowing down the slanted floor in biblical floods.

Roswell has corpses like that in that old farmhouse.

The whisper? It couldn't be.

Prote slammed the table with a ringed fist, catapulting his lukewarm goat's milk coffee onto the passed-out researcher.

"DAMNIT, THOSE WORKERS WERE MINE! DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH MONEY THIS WILL COST! HELL, THAT ORB IS MY PROPERTY NOW!"

"Sit down, Prote!" He roared. His face hardened. "If you weren't a donor, I'd have you waterboarded until you fessed up what this... thing is."

Prote's face anger thickened into something more petulant.

"How should I know?"

General Hox lips barely parted before the hunched president silenced them both with a wave of his hand.

"Because it is a god damn magic sphere! Found in YOUR mine! Next to YOUR research facility that sent YOUR workers into a feedin' frenzy. If I find out this is some bioweapon, you're carting off to the Russians I'll bury you!"

I couldn't stand...any of it anymore.

"QUIET! "

"No one cares about your ledger, Prote, and Mr. President, polling data suggests we're a little late for campaigning."

Prote recoiled spittle flicking from his lips.

President Cane shook the loose skin of his cheeks before turning to the general.

“Who the hell is the intern, and where’d he get the nerve? ”

Hox rubbed his drooped, clumpy face as if to brush off the ache from his leathery skin. His steel-toe boot clicked and clacked as he walked towards my chair.

He stopped before gazing down

"Meet Special Agent Michael Tate, FBI," Hox said, his voice dropping beneath the concrete flagstones. "The last man alive who worked the Roswell recovery in '47. If anyone in this zip code or any other knows what to do with a space orb, it's him."

"Everything about that case has been redacted and burnt, General, and you know it," I snapped, my heart clambering through my throat.

The hand of the clock focused on the orb.

Time wanted it.

"The walls of this bunker have heard far worse, Agent. Hell, we even paid for the concrete with 'Save the Whales' donations and black-budget medicaid funds." Hox leaned in, his shadow swallowing my desk, the opacity switch flicked.

"Now, look at the sphere, lick it, hump it, do whatever you got to do to tell me if it's the same flavor as the one in New Mexico."

The whisper, the damn whisper. It wasn't perfect, or maybe it was. It was one of them. It needed to burn, no, I could hear . God, it was so perfect, no, no.

“FLICK THE BLOODY SWITCH!” I cried, plugging my ears and shutting my eyes so tightly that my eyelids overlapped and shook with the effort.

The Chrysalid disappeared into the darkness of the glass once more. My chest heaved in a way I hadn't felt in twenty years.

“Private Roane, incinerate the chrysalid immediately! ”

"Yes, sir," he blurted, his cadence practiced as if it were the only words that knew how to escape his masked mouth.

President Cane stood up, inserting himself in the soldier's path.

"Hold on, son," the President interjected, his voice trembling with feverish intensity. "Don't you see? This is a great pivot for history. A mass effect! We can harness this for good through science." His hands moved erratically as the hulk stood like a confused child. President Cane slowed his tempo.

"Think if we can map the frequency of that... that...whisper, we don't just stop wars. We create a utopia. We ensure the American people never have to make a difficult or wrong decision ever again. You'll be a hero! I promise! Hell, once I'm reelected, you'll get a whole parade for your bravery."

Hox's face soured.

"Mr. President, with all due respect, our job is to protect the American people, not enslave them with alien orbs. Wake up the egghead, we're getting to the bottom of this."

Private Roane moved away from the incineration switch and produced a small vial of smelling salts, putting it to the still passed-out weasley nose of the spindly scientist.

The scientist shot up, wheezing and asthmatic breath as he coughed up clumpy phlegm.

"YOU LET IT OUT OF THE CONTAINMENT FIELD! IT NEEDS LEAD, NOT GLASS. Don't LOOK AT IT" He barely got through the sentence before collapsing back in his sweat puddle.

"Damn lightweight, It don't do nothing" Hox muttered his thick aviators blocking the orb's glow. "Egghead's on your payroll at the Janus facility. Start talking, what exactly were you doing down there?"

Prote didn't answer; he simply stood up and walked to the blacked-out box his loafers clicking on the slate tiles, a thin slime forming where the obsidian-glass edges met.

He licked it.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" President Cane barked, his hand hovering over the button to call in security. "You want space-gonorrhoea? And why the hell is that box leaking?"

"I don't know it tastes.. It tastes... It tastes perfect. I've been to every Michelin Star, Jamie Oliver, crystal cup restaurant on the East Coast, and I've never tasted anything like this. I... I feel..amazing. "

He's compromised; he'd listened to the whisper.

Rage bubbled in my marrow—the words frothing in my throat like melted rock.

“Private, eliminate Prote this instant!”

“You can’t be serious,” Prote blurted, his bravado failing, yet his eyes remained glazed and focused on the box.”

“Sir, I meant to protect the lots of you. I can’t murda’ a guest.”

Hox slammed the table his calloused fist, sundering the room.

“No one’s dying today, at least not yet. I’ve wanted to shoot this pomp bastard since before he walked in, but if we shot every billionaire I didn’t like, we’d be no better than the Commies. Now explain what this thing is capable of! ”

“It’s too late, you brought a hivemind into the Pentagon, and we’re the damn hive.”

The air frosted, the soupy air thickening with implication and confusion. Hox didn’t flinch, yet the steel in his gaze rusted.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Hox demanded.

“Wait, where is Prote ?”

The words died in my mouth. I felt something.

Was that crack always there?

Pulsating headache, a numbing flash of bright purple light, smells of lavender, of spring's first rain, the change of seasons, *oh, god, it's sweet.*

The softest lullaby, siren’s calling from shimmering grotto, eyes entranced to the opened cell, the sacred orb. *God’s eye, must have been. There could be no other.*

Embrace holy whisper, unworthy spawn.

Did I think that? Must have been.

I opened my eyes.

I wasn’t in that dank room anymore. smell of turf. I’m under the bleachers of my high school's football stadium. Girl on my arm, my limbs strong and young,

This is reality; I was only dreaming before.

I was always a kicker; a scorer; a winner not a failed FBI loser.

I ran up the field, the ball resting on the pitch, winners don't hesitate, and with all my might.--CRUNCH!

Crowd whispers my name.

What? Crunch, that wasn't the sound of a field goal.

"JESUS CHRIST," Prote screamed as something red and pink splattered on his now not spotless Italian loafers.

I looked down at my shoe.

I was back in the Pentagon, my foot without their football cleats, toe deep in a skull, his name was Dr. Enki.

"Private restrain the murderer, and blow up that god damn sphere!" Hox brayed his composure shattering as my boot rested in the spindly scientist's brain matter.

No, not again. It was only a rock. It was only a rock.

Cane blocked the private's path

"Hold on, stand down, private, we've got plenty of egg heads around, ain't no big loss. What we don't got plenty is somethin' that can turn someone whose field report called him 'best suited for assignments off water due to seasickness' into a damn monster that can kick a hole through a man's skull, now get out of the way and open the box."

"B-but, Sir, he just mur-murdered the man. All that pink stuff an' blood... he ain't breathin' no more." The private shrank inside his hulking form.

"Open the box, Private."

"B-but, Sir"

"NOW!" Cane exploded as if his words could shatter the glass themselves.

Private Roane's hand hovered over the latch, his knuckles white as fallen doves. His breath released in wet hitches through his mask. "I can't, Mr. President. My orders... the General..."

Roswell, Roswell, this wasn't the same species.

I didn't kill him, it was only a dream.

My mind is mine, my mind isn't a whisper.

Cane couldn't open the box.

My legs waited for a command from another mind...*A better mind, they didn't want to move did I want to?*

I could only look. Hox pulled out his sidearm, a Colt .45, raising it at Private Roane.

"Step away from the switch, Private," Hox commanded, his hand steady even as his face quivered sweat through melted pores. "That is a direct order. No one gets lobotomized over a damn election."

My body still locked, but my eyes were free and open

Where is Prote?

From the shadows of a broken fluorescent light, pounces, eyes wild, purple slime leaking from a forcefully unhinged jaw. Manicured nails rip at the general's fire-blazen eyes.

Hox roared the scream of a beast whose leg had been snapped in a bear trap. He fired blindly as Prote climbed onto his back with ravenous hunger.

A stray shot grazed my thigh, sinew snapping, yet I remained still, foot trapped in Enki's rapidly drying brain.

"THE GOO, IT'S IN YOU HOX I KNOW IT! I HEARD THE WHISPER I NEED THE TASTE!" The words thrown from a throat choked with desperation. His jaw snaps onto the General's clumpy jugular, ivory veneers sawing at the grizzled flesh; blood spews from the gap like a burst pipe. Prote's mouth suctions the wound as blood pours into his gapping maw till his cheeks swell and his esophagus floods..

They fall to the ground, Prote continues sucking as the general releases his final death throw. The billionaire's eyes roll back, he almost to giggle with delight as the thick blood clogs his airways. He turns red, then blue, and finally purple, a new morbid final purple.

Hox, Prote, Enki lie in the same color.

Their souls make the long trek above the roof, or the easy trip beneath the concrete foundation.

The half-empty gun rests on the pile, its bloody handle gleaming.

*This can't be another Roswell, another Janus, another this or whatever this damn .. Perfect...
godly... conduit wanted—NO NOTHINGS PERFECT!*

The words finally claw their way from my throat, I fling myself forward as I crawl towards the weapon.

“I AM NO KICKER! I AM NO PUPPET! I AM A WINNER! I SURVIVED ROSWELL! I AM A SPECIAL AGENT MICHEAL TATE FB-GOD-DANM-I!”

My fingers brushed the cold steel of the Colt, but a heel slammed down onto my wrist, pinning it to the bloody slate with a shattering crunch. I looked up, the pain a razor in the metallic pulse of the room.

Cane.

“It’s over, Agent. You can’t destroy it, people need it, they crave the control, the memory, the command. Perfection isn’t corruption, it’s peace, freedom from autonomy.”

He raises the gun at my head, finger tight on the trigger.

I close my eyes, I couldn’t blame him, whisper made me do worse in that Roswell farmhouse, family died screaming as well.

–BOOM!–

I was alive.

Somehow.

President Cane’s face hangs from a mushy stump on his neck. He falls to the slate.

Purple, as any other, never to make a wrong decision again.

Roane

His rifle smokes.

“I’m real sorry, buh’ he’s telling me I got’s to put you down too. I follows orders.”

He points the rifle.

Tears of a marionette, –BOOM!– then darkness.

Perfectly dark.

The United Gazette Presidential Report

In a shocking turn of events, independent candidate Bill Roane has jumped ninety-four points in the polls after his new commercial featuring “The Perfect Whisper”, in which he promised to distribute the cure-all medicine Chrysalid to every American! Remember, follow perfect whispers, be perfect people!