



THE NO.1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

DEAN
KOONTZ

DEVOTED



ONE BOY WITH THE POWER TO SAVE THE WORLD.
ONE MAN WITH THE WILL TO DESTROY IT.

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*To Joe McNeely.
Among his many virtues
is the ability to laugh at himself—
along with the rest of us.
The world is better with him in it.*

All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog.

—*Franz Kafka*

We are alone, absolutely alone on this chance planet; and amid all the forms of life that surround us, not one, excepting the dog, has made an alliance with us.

—*Maurice Maeterlinck*

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.

—*Mark Twain*

A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself.

—*Josh Billings*

**DARKER
THAN
DARKNESS**



TUESDAY 4:00 P.M.—WEDNESDAY 5:00 P.M.

1

Three years after the accident, Megan Bookman's heart and mind were in a good place, although occasionally anxiety afflicted her, a feeling that time was running out, that a sinkhole might at any moment open under her. This wasn't intuition at work, but just the consequence of being widowed at thirty. A love that she'd thought would endure, a man she had believed would grow old with her: All was taken away without warning. This current sense that somewhere bells were tolling toward her final hour would pass; it always did.

She stood in the doorway of her only child's bedroom, watching him at his computer with its array of associated equipment, as he researched whatever currently fascinated him.

Woodrow Bookman, Woody to everyone, had never spoken a word in his eleven years of life. At birth and for a few years thereafter, he cried, but not once since he'd turned four years old. He laughed, although seldom at anything that was said to him or at any comical sight. The cause of his amusement was often internal and a mystery to his mother. He had been diagnosed with a rare form of autism, although in truth the doctors didn't know what to make of him.

Fortunately, he had none of the most challenging behavior associated with autism. He wasn't prone to emotional meltdowns, wasn't inflexible. As long as he was in the company of those he knew, he never recoiled when touched or suffered mentally from physical contact, though he found strangers suspect and often frightening. He listened intently to everything that was said to him, and he was at least as obedient as Megan had been in childhood.

He didn't go to school, but neither was he homeschooled. Woody was the ultimate autodidact. He taught himself to read only a few months after his fourth birthday, and he was reading at a college level three years later.

Megan loved Woody. How could she not? He had been conceived in love. His heart began beating as he formed within her. As far as she was concerned, it beat in sync with hers all these years later.

Besides, he was as cute as any kid in a cookie commercial and, in his own way, affectionate. Although he allowed himself to be hugged and kissed, he neither hugged nor kissed in return. At the most unexpected moments, however, he reached out and put a hand on hers, or he touched her

jet-black hair and then his own, as though to say that he knew he had received it from her.

He seldom made eye contact, but when he did, his eyes sometimes glimmered with unshed tears. Lest she think that he might be sad on these occasions, he always favored her with a smile, almost a grin. When she asked if his tears were happy tears, he nodded *yes*. But he could not—or would not—explain what made him happy.

The difficulties of communication meant they couldn't share their lives to the fullest extent that Megan desired, which was a persistent sadness. This kid had broken her heart a thousand times, but with his sweetness, he had also healed it a thousand times.

She never wished that he were normal and not afflicted, for then he would have been a different boy. She loved him in spite of—in part *because of*—the challenging journey that they were taking together.

Now, watching him from the doorway of his room, she said, “Is everything okay, Woody? Are you all right?”

Although intently focused on his computer, his back to her, he raised his right arm full length, pointing at the ceiling with his index finger, a gesture that she had long ago learned was positive and more or less meant *I'm on the moon, Mom*.

“All right, then. It's eight o'clock. Bed at ten.”

He made a whirling gesture with the raised index finger, and then his hand dropped back to the keyboard.

2

After saving the document that he'd titled “The Son's Revenge: Faithfully Compiled Evidence of Monstrous Evil,” on which he'd been working for a long time, Woody Bookman, eleven, switched off his computer and went into his en suite bathroom and brushed his teeth with a battery-powered Sonicare toothbrush. He wasn't allowed to own a manually powered brush because he was an obsessive brusher who, left to his own devices, would scrub his teeth hard for twenty minutes. Over time, this habit would wear away his gums and require transplants. At ten, he had needed oral surgery to save three teeth on the lower-left side.

These days, periodontists used sterilized, irradiated tissue from cadavers for such repairs. Woody already had some dead guy's gum tissue around three teeth, and he didn't want more. Not that anything weird had happened because of the dead-guy tissue. Woody didn't experience memory flashes of

the donor's life or have the urge to eat someone, like on *The Walking Dead*. The transplant hadn't turned him into a zombie. Such an idea was stupid science.

Woody was embarrassed for people who believed stupid science, which a lot of them did. He was also embarrassed for people who got angry over petty things, for people who called other people names, for people who were mean to animals. For a lot of reasons, a great many people made him embarrassed for them.

He was embarrassed *for himself*, that he was a danger to his own teeth. The Sonicare had a two-minute timer; you were never supposed to scrub with the bristles, but instead let the sound waves remove the plaque. Without the timer, Woody's mouth would be a graveyard's worth of gum tissue.

He was also embarrassed because sometimes he thought about kissing a girl, an act that never crossed his mind until recently. Kissing seemed gross—*yuck*—swapping spit. Something must be going wrong with him that he would yearn for it. He was *also*—yet again, it never stopped—embarrassed because if he ever did ask some girl's permission to kiss her, he would never tell her about his dead-guy gums, for fear she would vomit and run away. He'd lie by omission, which was mortifying to contemplate, because lying was a prime source of all human suffering. The word *mortification* could be defined as a painful sense of humiliation, worse than embarrassment.

As long as he could remember, Woody had been embarrassed for himself and for other people. That was one reason he never talked. If he dared to talk, he'd tell people what they did that embarrassed him, and he'd tell them what he found embarrassing about himself, which was a long list. He was a mess. He really was. People didn't want to hear about what a mess he was or what a mess they were. But not to tell would be to lie by omission, and the thought of lying so mortified him that he became nauseous. Better to stay silent, say nothing, and maybe people would like you. And if you didn't tell them what an embarrassing mess you were, maybe they wouldn't notice.

One of the most embarrassing things about people was how unobservant they were.

After he brushed his teeth, he went to bed and turned out the nightstand lamp. He wasn't afraid of the dark. There weren't ghosts or vampires or werewolves or anything like that, and there was zero chance that a dead guy might creep into the bedroom to take his gum tissue back.

The only monsters were people. Not all people. Just some of them. Like those who had killed his father. Dad had been dead for three years, and no one had been put in prison for murder. Everyone still thought his death had been an accident. Woody knew better. Now that he had at last finished “The Son’s Revenge: Faithfully Compiled Evidence of Monstrous Evil,” those individuals responsible would be brought to justice.

Woody was very smart. He’d been reading at a college level since he was seven years old, which maybe didn’t mean a whole lot, considering that many college graduates didn’t seem to know anything. He was an accomplished computer hacker. During the past two years, he’d penetrated highly protected computer systems, in which he had planted rootkits that allowed him to swim through their networks without their security becoming aware that a secret fish explored the data depths. His explorations had also led him into strange places on the Dark Web.

Now, waiting for sleep, Woody encouraged himself to think of something pleasant. He was embarrassed when he imagined himself kissing a girl whom he had seen in a magazine photo. He tried to turn his mind to another subject, but he couldn’t. He wondered if one day, a few years from now, he might meet a girl who’d had gum transplants, which would give them something in common. He had been kissed on the cheek and on the forehead, though not on the mouth, but had never kissed anyone in turn. If he met such a girl, maybe that would be a nice place to start.

3

Dorothy smelled of death.

She was seventy-six. She would be gone shortly after dawn.

This was a hard truth. The world was a beautiful place, but it was full of hard truths.

The live-in hospice-care nurse, Rosa Leon, attended to her in the bedroom where Dorothy had slept most nights of her long life.

Rosa smelled of life and strawberry-scented shampoo and the peppermint hard candies that she enjoyed.

In this room, Dorothy and her late husband, Arthur, had made love and conceived one child, Jack.

Arthur had been an accountant. He died at sixty-seven.

Jack had died in a war at the age of twenty-eight. His parents outlived him by decades.

Losing a child was the central tragedy of Dorothy’s life.

But she was proud of Jack, and resilient, and she carried on, living a life that mattered.

Kipp had never met Jack or Arthur. He knew them only because Dorothy had so often spoken of them.

Rosa sat in an armchair, reading a paperback, unaware that Death was en route.

At the moment, Dorothy slept, sedated and without pain.

Kipp suffered when Dorothy was in serious pain. He had lived with her only three years. But he loved her desperately.

It was his nature to love beyond reason.

Before the moment of her passing might come, he needed to steel himself, prepare to deal with the loss.

He went downstairs and out through his door and onto the deep back deck to get some fresh air.

The house stood about twenty feet above Lake Tahoe. A minimal tide lapped softly on the beach, and sharp-edged reflections of a scimitar moon shimmered across the rippled water.

A mild breeze brought a rich *mélange* of odors: pine trees, cedars, woodsmoke from a fireplace, forest mast, wild mushrooms, squirrels, raccoons, and much more.

Kipp was also aware of a strange continuous murmur. He'd only recently begun to hear it.

He'd first thought it might be tinnitus, with which he knew some people suffered, but it was not that.

He could almost hear words in that strange unremitting flow, which came from somewhere to the west. West by northwest.

After Dorothy died, Kipp would need to investigate, find the source of the sound. He was grateful to have an immediate purpose.

He descended from the deck to the yard to stare for a while at the stars, wondering.

Although he was exceedingly smart—only Dorothy knew how smart—he had no idea what it all meant.

Join the club. All the philosophers of history, much wiser than he, had failed to conceive a theory that satisfied everyone.

Shortly after he returned to Dorothy's bedroom, she woke.

Seeing Rosa reading a novel, Dorothy spoke in a frail voice. "Rosie, dear, you should read aloud to Kipp."

Humoring her patient, the nurse said, “Don’t you think Dickens is beyond his grade level?”

“Oh, not at all, not at all. He enjoyed *Great Expectations* when I read it to him, and he adored *A Christmas Carol*.”

Kipp stood bedside, gazing up at her, wagging his tail.

Dorothy patted the mattress, an invitation.

Kipp sprang onto the bed. Lying at her side, he rested his chin on her hip.

She put one hand on his burly head and gently stroked his pendant ears, his coat of golden fur.

Even with hateful Death on the doorstep, sweet bliss found an equal home with grief in Kipp’s heart.

4

The two-lane blacktop is a dark snake slithering through the moon-washed paleness of the Utah wastelands. In the nearly empty vastness, small clusters of lights glimmer here and there in the distance, like extraterrestrial pod craft that have descended from the mother ship on some nefarious mission.

Traveling south out of the Provo suburbs into ever-greater isolation, Lee Shacket dares not take Interstate 15. He uses less-busy state highways, undivided federal highways when he must, anxious to put as much distance as possible between himself and the events at the Springville facility.

If he has committed as much evil as any man in history, he has done it with the best intentions. He believes that those intentions matter more than the consequences of his actions. How could humanity have advanced from caves to orbiting space stations if all men and women were risk averse? Some seek knowledge and rise to challenges at whatever cost, and because of them, progress is made.

Anyway, all may be well in the end. The final result of the project is not yet known, only that it’s gone wrong in mid stage. Every scientific endeavor is marked by setbacks. Ultimately, failure can be the father of success if one learns from the errors made.

Initially, however, he is treating this failure as absolute.

He is driving neither his Tesla nor his Mercedes SL 550, because eventually the authorities will be looking for him. He is tooling along in a fully loaded bloodred Dodge Demon that he purchased for \$146,000 through an LLC based in the Cayman Islands, to which his name can’t be linked even by the most determined investigator. The vehicle bears a Montana

license plate. In the unlikely event that a connection between him and the car might be made by law enforcement, the GPS has been removed from the Dodge to prevent its location from being discovered by satellite.

One of two suitcases in the trunk contains \$100,000. Another \$300,000 in hundred-dollar bills can be accessed by disengaging two pressure latches on the back of the front passenger seat, revealing a secret compartment. Sewn into the lining of his supple black leather jacket, which is cut like a sport coat, are thirty-six high-quality diamonds worth half a million to any gem wholesaler.

These assets are not intended to support him for the rest of his life. They are to be used to allow him to go to ground for a few months, until the furor over the Springville fiasco subsides, make his way out of the United States, and get safely to Costa Rica by an indirect route involving five countries and three identity changes. In Costa Rica, he owns a retreat under the name Ian Stonebridge, and he possesses a valid Swiss passport in that identity.

He is the CEO of Refine, a multibillion-dollar division of a mega-valued conglomerate. Few CEOs of multibillion-dollar companies have the foresight to imagine a corporate crisis dire enough to require the preparation of a new identity and the hiding away of sufficient capital overseas to sustain a high standard of living for decades to come. Shacket takes pride in the fact that he has been wise and discreet for a man so much younger than most other CEOs.

He is thirty-four, which isn't all that young for a guy in his position in an economic sector where companies have been founded by technology wizards who became billionaires in their twenties. He answers to Dorian Purcell, the chairman of the board of the parent company, who was a billionaire at twenty-seven and is now thirty-eight, but Shacket himself is worth only a hundred million.

Dorian wanted the research at Springville to proceed at a breakneck pace. Shacket obliged because, were they to succeed in their primary project, stock options would make him a billionaire, too, although probably not a multibillionaire, while Dorian's fifty-billion-dollar fortune would most likely double.

The injustice of this unequal compensation causes Shacket to grind his teeth in his sleep; he often wakes with aching jaws. A mere billionaire is a nobody among the princes of high tech. In spite of their pretensions to social equality, many of this crowd are among the most class-conscious elite bigots

the world has ever known. Lee Shacket despises them almost as much as he wants to be one of them.

If he has to go into hiding for the rest of his life with only a measly hundred million to sustain himself, he will have a lot of free time in which to plot the ruination of Purcell and little or no inclination to do anything else.

From the start, Lee Shacket has understood that, should something go very wrong, he will have to take the fall. Dorian Purcell will forever remain untouchable, an icon of the high-tech revolution. Nevertheless, now that Shacket is having to pay that price, he feels deceived, tricked, bamboozled.

Driving through the early night, he is racked by anger and by self-pity and anxiety, but also by what he believes to be grief, an emotion that is new to him. Ninety-two Refine employees are in the locked-down high-security facility near Springville, prevented from communicating with the outside world, in their final hours of life. He's as pissed off at them as at Dorian. One of those geniuses—or several—has done something careless that sealed their fate and put him in this untenable position. Yet some are his friends, to the extent that a CEO can allow himself friends among those he must supervise, and their suffering, as it should, distresses him.

During the building of that complex, he'd taken pains to ensure that the module containing his office and those of his immediate support staff—five others—would go into airtight lockdown ninety seconds *after* all of the labs were hermetically sealed in a crisis. When the alarm sounded, he assured his staff that they were safe, that they should stay at their posts—and he quietly departed.

He had no choice but to lie to them. The alarm didn't announce impending disaster, but an immediate one. They are as contaminated as the researchers in the labs. Shacket is likewise contaminated, but in mortal circumstances like these, he isn't capable of lying to himself as easily as he lied to them.

Anyway, he's always been clever about eluding the consequences of his mistakes. Maybe his luck will hold through one last escape.

He'll soon be hunted, the quarry of legitimate authorities but also of Dorian's ruthless cleanup crew. He hopes, in what he believes is a spirit of mercy and sorrow, that all employees at Springville will perish before any can bear witness against him.

When Rosa Leon went downstairs to make a sandwich for herself, Kipp was alone with Dorothy.

The lamplight was low, the shadows as smooth as still water, the stately pine beyond the window silvered with moonlight.

She said, "I have arranged with Rosa that you will be with her when I've gone. She'll take good care of you."

By way of acknowledgment, Kipp thumped his tail three times on the mattress. Three meant *Yes, all right*. One thump meant *No* or *That feels wrong*.

In truth, his destiny would take him elsewhere than with Rosa.

No need, however, to distress Dorothy.

"Short stuff, you have been a gift of no less value to me than my son, Jack, or dear sweet Arthur."

Kipp raised his head from his mistress's hip to lick her pale hand, with which she so often smoothed his coat and fed him treats.

"I wish together we might have found a way to solve the mystery of your origins."

With a long sigh, Kipp expressed agreement.

"But in the end, our origins are all the same, born in the heart that shaped all that is."

Kipp yearned to say so much to her while time remained.

Although his intelligence had somehow been enhanced to a human level, he lacked the vocal apparatus for speech. He could make many sounds, but none were words.

She had devised a clever method of communication, but it was in a ground-floor room, and she lacked the strength to go downstairs.

It didn't matter. Everything he wanted to say to her had been said before. *I love you. I will miss you terribly. I will never forget you.*

"Dear child," she said, "let me look into your eyes."

He adjusted himself, laid his head upon her breast, and met her loving gaze.

"Your eyes and heart are as golden as your breed, dear Kipp."

Her eyes were blue and clear and deep.

6

Lee Shacket parks his Dodge Demon in a far corner of the lot at the Best Western motel in the small town of Delta, Utah. Sitting in the car, he shaves off his immaculately trimmed beard, which he's had since he was twenty-

four. He washes his hands with a sanitizer and inserts nonprescription contact lenses to change his eyes from tungsten-gray to brown.

After pulling on a baseball cap to conceal most of his blond hair, he heads south on State Route 257, transitions to Route 21, then to Route 130. After 125 miles, he arrives in Cedar City, where he registers at the Holiday Inn, using a driver's license and credit card in the name of Nathan Palmer.

In his room, before dyeing his hair, he needs to know if the situation in the Springville facility has made it to cable news. Standing in front of the television, the first thing he sees is video taken near the end of the workday, before nightfall. When he'd fled, the lab complex hadn't been ablaze. The fire broke out minutes after his frantic departure. The ferocious flames tower sixty or seventy feet above the lab complex, from one end to the other.

The blaze must have been triggered to obliterate the truth of what happened in that place. Without his knowledge, fuel of some kind and an ignition system must have been incorporated into the structure to ensure that all proof of the nature of the work being done there would never be discovered in the aftermath of a crisis.

He has no doubt that the researchers were intentionally burned alive—incinerated, nothing but bones left, if even that—to deny the coroner evidence. Although they might have died anyway, in days or weeks, the profound cruelty of the incineration of the staff shocks Lee and leaves him so weak in the legs that he needs to sit on the edge of the bed.

He had abandoned those people to their fate, yes, but Dorian had decided their fate for them. There are degrees of evil, and Lee Shacket takes refuge in the thought that what he's done pales when compared to what his boss has done.

Surely Dorian Purcell has secretly authorized this extreme measure, his idea of a fail-safe. Dorian fancies himself a visionary, as does nearly everyone in the press who writes about him, and a true visionary knows that progress requires sacrifices, that what matters is not the short-term cost in lives and treasure, but the great benefit to humanity that will be achieved in the long term. To justify murdering tens of millions, Stalin is reputed to have said, "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." By comparison, ninety-two deaths might be, to Dorian, nothing more than a mere footnote to the great enterprise that has been undertaken at Refine's Springville laboratories and will be relaunched elsewhere a year from now.

On the TV, a news anchor solemnly reports that the research being conducted at the facility involved seeking a revolutionary cure for cancer. This is a ridiculous lie, but the newsreader no doubt believes it. Cancer research isn't so dangerous as to require that it be conducted in a walled, isolated compound a mile from the last residences on the outskirts of a Provo, Utah, suburb. However, in an age when news departments operate on tight budgets, many in the media tend to believe whatever they're told by any source they trust, reserving investigative journalism solely for those they find dishonorable or suspicious. In public, at least, Dorian Purcell holds all the right positions on issues that matter to the opinion makers and is all but universally seen as one of the good guys.

The preliminary official explanation for the fire is that the facility maintains its own dedicated power plant to minimize outages that would affect research projects, that the plant is fueled by natural gas, and that perhaps a leak under the foundation went undetected until the building was basically perched on a bomb.

"Yeah, right," says Lee, switching off the TV.

Later, having become a new brown-haired brown-eyed clean-shaven man, he goes out to dinner. Never a snob about food, he has happily eaten his share of Holiday Inn fare and the equivalent over the years, although on this occasion, nothing tastes appealing. The salad greens are bitter. The vegetables are vaguely metallic. The potatoes have no flavor. He is able to eat the chicken, but it isn't as savory as it ought to be.

He craves something else but doesn't know what might satisfy. Nothing on the menu holds any appeal for him.

In his room again, he mixes spiced rum with Coca-Cola and drinks until he can sleep.

At three thirty in the morning, screaming, slick with cold sweat, he wakes from a nightmare of which he can remember not a single detail.

The disorientation that is characteristic of dreams remains with him. At the windows, an otherworldly cobalt-blue light leaks around the edges of the draperies, as though in the world beyond these walls, a silent catastrophe is emitting lethal radiation. He is sober, but the small room feels vast, the bed adrift on a sea of undulant shadows. When Lee throws back the covers and sits on the edge of the mattress, the floor crawls under his bare feet, as though carpeted by an insect horde. He fumbles with the nightstand lamp and finds the switch. Sudden low light beaches the floating bed and reveals

no insects. Yet the place is almost as shadowy as—and no less eerie than—it had been in the dark.

After rising from the bed, he stands in indecision, certain that coiled within the nightmare had been an urgent presentiment of an onrushing evil that isn't merely a sleeper's fantasy, that is instead a truth on which he needs to act to save himself. But still he has no memory of the dream.

He settles in a chair, gripping the upholstered arms with both hands, rocking back and forth even though the chair isn't a rocker and doesn't move in sympathy with him. He can't seem to be still. He needs to move, as if to prove to himself that he's alive.

In the nightmare . . . He recalls something now. He'd been trapped, paralyzed, wrapped tightly, as though cocooned, a white translucent material across his eyes; formless shadows swelling and receding; sounds rising and fading around him.

With a shudder, he wonders if the spectrum of genetic material with which his cells have been contaminated might include that of some worm that dies only to be born anew from a cocoon.

He was helpless in the dream, and lonely. He rocks ceaselessly in the unmoving armchair. He has immediate getaway money and an elegant residence in Costa Rica and \$100 million where no authorities can find it, but a profound loneliness makes him vulnerable, with no meaningful purpose.

He feels powerless, as when he'd been a child under the iron rule of a violent alcoholic father and a mentally disturbed mother.

He can't endure being powerless. *He cannot tolerate it.*

In addition to the scientists at Springville, twenty-two hundred Refine employees had answered to him. Now he has authority over no one. He had power, position, respect, twenty Tom Ford suits that he wore with colorful sneakers. All that is gone. He is alone.

Only now does he realize that the worst of all miseries to afflict the human heart is loneliness.

Lee Shacket has never been good at relationships. He's had girlfriends. Hot ones. He's not a troll. Women like the way he looks. They admire his ambition. He has a sense of humor. He can dance. He has style. He's good in bed. He *listens*. But he's never been able to *sustain* a love affair. Sooner than later, each woman starts to seem inadequate, inauthentic in one way or another. The relationship begins to feel shallow, lacking worthwhile

emotional nourishment, a mere teaspoon of romantic essence; nevertheless, he always eventually feels as if he's drowning in that teaspoonful, suffocating, and he needs to escape.

He has gone still in the armchair. His stillness alarms him, as if staying alive depends on remaining in motion. He thrusts to his feet and paces the room, increasingly anxious.

Something strange is happening to him.

In the low lamplight, his restless reflection in the mirror is spectral, as if it's the spirit of some former guest who died here and is wanted neither upstairs nor down, who has nowhere to go.

As he circles the room, he tries to recall when and where his life went wrong, not regarding the events at the labs, but prior to that. When had he last been truly happy? It seems important that he remember. When had his future been most promising?

Although Lee has achieved great success with Dorian Purcell, each promotion comes with such a significant increase in stress that, in spite of making a fortune, he can't honestly say he has been happier during these years than before.

Even prior to Purcell, Lee hadn't always been in high spirits, but his *prospects* for happiness had been greater then. He'd had hope in those days. The options open to him had seemed infinite; whereas now he has few, perhaps only one.

And he is alone. No one to listen. No one to understand. No one to care. No one who must answer to him.

The turning point, the motive force that changed Lee's life, is Jason Bookman, a friend since college. Initially, Jason's career soared, while Lee's labored along. Then Jason brought him into Dorian Purcell's inner circle.

As he paces, his reflection in the closet-door mirror disturbs him. His face. Something strange is happening to his face; something is wrong with it.

He hurries into the bathroom, where the light is better. His eyes are brown, hair brown, beard gone. Maybe others won't recognize him, but he knows himself. His mud-brown glower is unimpressive when compared to the piercing tungsten-gray stare with which he had cowed so many junior executives. Otherwise, he looks all right.

But he doesn't *feel* all right. His face is as stiff as a mask. He works his facial muscles—yawning, puckering, grimacing. With his fingertips, he massages his chin and cheeks and brow, pinches his nose, pulls on his lips,