

## Autophobia

by  
Lawrence Buentello

“I’m becoming someone else.”

Dr. Kurt Morgan nodded noncommittally at the statement of his patient and pressed his fingers to his lips. It was a nervous habit, one his wife constantly tried to get him to curb, but some unconscious acts were beyond redemption. Walker had spent the last five minutes trying to make Morgan understand the specificity of his complaint, but Morgan was having little success. His probative questioning had led to one closed door after another. Finally he said, “Do you feel as if you’re possessed?”

“No,” Walker said. His clear blue eyes held Morgan’s gaze with a command of self that Morgan would have a difficult time describing as manic. “I’m being taken over by someone else.”

Morgan studied the man who had walked through the door of his office only a few minutes previously. Despite his psychiatric training, he still appreciated the information the human body could silently convey. And John Walker offered a memorable first impression. A tall, elegant man, Walker had stepped into the room like an usher at the showing of a body. He was clean-shaven, wore a short razor cut and was dressed in a finely tailored suit. His shoes were expensive and shone like armor beneath the florescent lighting. He sat in the chair before Morgan’s desk, crossed his legs and held his hands on the crest of his knee. Morgan’s impression of Walker was that the man might have just come from the meeting room of the board of trustees of a major financial institution.

“I’m afraid of myself,” Walker said.

“Autophobia.”

“Pardon me?”

“Autophobia is the fear of oneself. It’s a rare condition.”

“I’m not really afraid of myself, really. I’m afraid of the person trying to steal my body.”

“And that is not possession?”

“No.” Walker shook his head. “I don’t know what to call it. But I do know that it’s very real and I have no idea what to do.”

Morgan sat back in his chair. “You’re afraid of yourself. Or, rather, this other person.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“For obvious reasons,” Walker said, and he spread his arms in a gesture of frustration. He shifted in his chair and then, with an evidently

conscious intent, lay his hands back on his knee. “I mean, I’m not afraid of myself. That much must be obvious. I’m very comfortable with myself. It is the other... entity, component, I don’t know how else to say it, who is causing me to be afraid. I think that he—it—whatever it is, is attempting to take over my body completely.”

“That sounds like possession.”

“Perhaps. But I think that this person—this man, is living inside of me now. He’s sleeping inside of me. And when I sleep, he wakes. I realize that sounds absurd, but I know that it’s happening. I’ve had independent corroboration.”

“I don’t doubt that you *think* this is really happening,” Morgan said carefully. “And I don’t doubt that others may have noticed definite changes in your behavior, but that in itself doesn’t constitute a supernatural experience. Mr. Walker, there is no such a thing as possession. Sometimes we’re all subject to stress and—”

“No, no,” Walker said emphatically. “I’m not under any stress except from myself—rather, the person that is trying to take over my body. This isn’t an illusion. I swear to you that this isn’t an illusion.”

Morgan nodded. Walker’s case was going to be very interesting indeed. He pulled Walker’s file folder from his desk and opened it. He scanned the profile that he’d had him complete at his request, personal history, past experiences and relevant beliefs. Walker displayed a typical compensatory personality, and Morgan thought that this might be the key to his treatment. The man, by all indications, was strictly conservative in his conduct and philosophies, fastidious in his dress and eloquent in his speech. It must be difficult for Walker to maintain such a finely hewn persona. Still, he reserved his judgment. But the one thing of which Morgan was absolutely certain was that he would be able to find insight into Walker’s condition and affect a treatment. Perhaps not the perfect treatment, but Morgan was very comfortable with his professional ability.

“Something is happening to me,” Walker said, his eyes focused seriously in an otherwise composed expression. “Something frightening, and I want it to stop.”

“I want to help you, too, Mr. Walker.”

“I don’t know that you can.”

Morgan rubbed his lips, recalling how many times that he’d heard the same pessimistic declaration, and said, “Please outline all the pertinent experiences for me, Mr. Walker.”

Walker nodded, stared directly into Morgan’s eyes and began his story.

“The symptoms began five months ago,” Walker said. “I began feeling tired in the morning after what I considered to be a decent night’s sleep. I thought that it was just a manifestation of age, because I’m approaching forty and I know that a man’s body experiences changes. But I had always eaten well and I’ve maintained a moderate exercise program. After experiencing this same weariness for a number of days, I began to suspect that I was suffering from some physical ailment, so I went to my physician and asked him to examine me, take my blood and the like. But all of his tests proved negative. He said that I was exhibiting symptoms of extreme exhaustion, and I told him that was ridiculous because I always went to bed at the same time every evening. He prescribed sleeping pills—he evidently thought that I was overreacting—and told me to take a vacation. I’ve always had a respectable workload, but I didn’t think that had anything to do with my fatigue. I was vigilant

in my habits, and there was no reason outside of illness to account for the way that I felt.

“At least, I thought that there was no other reason.

“One morning I woke, and was tired as usual, but that wasn’t what captured my attention. When I sat up in bed I realized that I was wearing dress pants and a clean white shirt. I was amazed, because I always sleep in my underwear. And when I lay down in bed the previous night I was definitely not dressed that way. I had no recollection of changing clothes in the middle of the night. I was perplexed then, but not immediately frightened. I wondered how this could have happened, but I saw no immediate explanation. It was an aberration that I wasn’t comfortable dealing with at the time, so I quickly changed and prepared for work.

“I realized that I must have risen sometime in the night and changed my clothes. But why? And why hadn’t I remembered doing so?

“I dismissed it and tried to forget the incident. And, for a few days, I had no more experiences of that nature beside the fatigue. But I know now what had happened. He—it, whatever it is, had forgotten to change when he returned. That was the answer to the question of my fatigue, of course. He’d been coming awake as soon as I fell asleep. He’d been rising from my bed, dressing, and conducting himself in whatever manner he chose. I know this is true from the stories that began getting back to me. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

“I began to notice small changes when I showered in the morning. Unaccounted bruises, cuts on my hands from some unremembered activity, a mouse under my eye, and... Well, it’s embarrassing for me to say, but love bites. Hickeys, I guess you could say. And other signs of... activity. This is very embarrassing for me, because I’m not the kind of man who believes in casual sexual relationships. How did these things manifest themselves on my body? I suppose that I had no clue of the whole truth at the time, simply an impression that I was living a double life. I was, by all the evidence before me, living another life as I slept, and I thought that I was going insane. I began waking in the morning dressed in casual clothes, when I was near nakedness when I laid down the previous night. One day I found a lamp pushed from the table on which it normally stood, and then discovered all of the items in my kitchen strewn about the floor as if I’d been searching for some implement. I was amnesic about all of these events. I was performing some elaborate sleepwalking ritual.

“After a couple of months of this craziness I consulted my physician again. But, of course, all this was beyond his practice and he suggested that I consult a mental health professional. I resisted as long as I could, but then these events began to accelerate, and I began to piece together what this other man had been doing. I became even more concerned, because... and I know this sounds psychotic, but I believed his intention was to take over my body completely. So I came to seek your help.”

Morgan leaned forward in his chair. Walker had been keenly composed throughout his statement, though that wasn’t necessarily an indication of his veracity. Many patients believed precisely what they described, no matter how bizarre or obviously afflicted it seemed to him or any other doctor. Morgan couldn’t help comparing Walker’s account to the Jekyll and Hyde scenario, and, though unusual, he felt that there

was a great deal more to Walker's personal history than the single sheet of paper before him related.

"Mr. Walker," Morgan said, "would you consider yourself a fairly conservative person?"

Walker stared at him warily. "I suppose that I am. That is, I suppose that anyone else would consider my beliefs conservative."

"I see that your dress is conservative, and your speech is well crafted. Are you also politically conservative?"

"I'm a Republican. I suppose that I do support traditional conservative political beliefs."

"Are you religious?"

"I'm Episcopalian."

"Devoutly so?"

"I am confident of my religious beliefs."

"I don't mean to offend you, I simply wish to receive an impression of your whole personality."

"I'm confident of my personal beliefs," Walker said. "I believe in God, proper moral behavior and congeniality. But that's not a crime."

"No, of course not."

"I'm perfectly satisfied with my personality."

"If I may ask," Morgan said, silently congratulating himself on accurately predicting the depth of Walker's conservative nature, "you mentioned that you managed to piece together what this other man had been doing. How did you come about this knowledge, and what did you find out?"

Morgan watched as Walker's jaw flexed appreciably.

"I began receiving telephone calls from people that I didn't know," Walker said. "Complete strangers. And yet, they knew my telephone number, which is unlisted, and they knew what I looked like and they claimed to recognize my voice. When the first of these calls began I was startled, but their subsequent frequency left me more mystified than afraid. A couple of men, I can't remember their names, called to see if I would like to go drinking with them again. Dr. Morgan, I don't drink and I would never do so for social reasons. But that was another symptom. I was waking in the morning with a terrible taste in my mouth, and even what I imagine to be a hangover. A terrible headache coupled with nausea. One man told me what a wonderful time he'd had with me, and that I was hilarious company. I had no idea what he was talking about, and I certainly would never frequent bars. I told him that I had no idea who he was or what he was referring to. He grew angry and claimed that I was being intentionally rude. I hung up the telephone on him, but he kept calling. And others called, too, even some woman. They spoke to me as if we had shared some special relationship, and all of these people were strangers to me.

"During one of these calls I grew curious, and began questioning this woman about the man that she'd been with. She described me physically, which startled me, and then she described my personality. And that is when I knew that something was horribly wrong. The man that she described was ebullient, openly sexual and loud. He was quick to laugh and to flirt ostentatiously. This man was my complete opposite, and his conduct was in contradiction to my own beliefs. The woman begged me to see her again, but I refused and hung up on her, too. I became so upset that I couldn't answer the telephone. I was terrified of what I might

hear next. But I shouldn't have been afraid of the telephone, because I had something even more frightening to worry about.

"One day I woke—I don't know how to say this, but I woke in the middle of the day. I'd laid down the night before, very much apprehensive of what might happen during the night, and then I woke from a sound sleep—but I woke during the middle of the day, at my office, in my work clothes. I was sitting at my desk when I came to consciousness. Do you understand? I hadn't awakened in the morning as I had been. This other man had gone to my office and had been conducting himself with my co-workers.

"I'm a supervisor, Dr. Morgan, I'm responsible for overseeing many people. Do you know what came immediately to mind when I realized what had happened? My only thoughts centered on what I had done in the building that morning. My office door was closed, thankfully so. I began to sweat. I began to wonder exactly what I'd said to these people, what my temperament had been like, what my conduct had been like. And I was too mortified to step out of the office to find out these things. Do you know the kind of panic I felt? It's impossible to describe. Some of my people remarked about my attitude, of course. They asked if I was feeling all right, or congratulated me on my new upbeat attitude and a lot of other nonsense. Now, I'm not a completely stiff man, but I'm very much a professional on the job, so I wasn't happy to hear that I'd been displaying traits belonging to this... man. I left work that day determined that this kind of blackout would never happen again. I set several alarm clocks to wake me, and I took a very strong sedative before going to sleep.

"It did no good. The only additional effect the sedatives had was to make me feel even more fatigued than before. I was waking up exhausted, and the alarms rang in my ears pathetically. I was living a cursed life. He was waking and carrying on despite the sedatives, so I ceased taking them. Four days later, I woke once again at the office. The practice continued for a week, and I suppose my co-workers thought that I was a complete loon. Then, on a Friday afternoon, I woke in the middle of a conversation in my office.

"I had apparently been speaking to a woman named Nancy. She was one of the administrative assistants in the building. And she was talking about the previous night, which we had apparently spent together. I don't wish to recount exactly what she said because it was embarrassing and vulgar. We had evidently had sex together, and she was talking about... things that we had done together. I can't repeat them. She eventually noticed the distressed expression on my face and she asked me if I was all right. I said, yes, but I was feeling a little sick at the stomach. She gave me a hurt look and asked me if we were still going to spend the weekend together. And then I knew that I was in serious trouble.

"Not only had I slept with a co-worker, a practice I find totally unethical, but this other man had made plans to take over my body for a complete weekend! I sat asking myself how all this had begun, and what I could do about it. It seemed to have happened so gradually, but now it was becoming terrifying. This man, this creature, was trying to take over my body, and he was becoming increasingly successful in his pursuits. Where had he come from? Why had he chosen me? And why was I so frightened of myself now? I was about to lose myself to this man, this thing, and I could do nothing to stop him. And then the last symptom occurred, the one which told me that I was in much greater difficulty than I previously believed.

“I began spontaneously falling asleep. Like narcolepsy, only more complete. I didn’t wake after a few minutes. I woke after hours. And sometimes I didn’t wake until the following day. I fell asleep beyond the steering wheel of my car one day, and woke in my own bed. I fell asleep in a meeting one afternoon, and woke sitting on a seat at the airport. Had he wanted to fly somewhere with my body? Had he been meeting someone, seeing someone off? He was beginning to live his life more fully than I was living mine, and I knew that something had to be done before all of my time was gone—before I became only a brief flash of consciousness in some errant dream of *his*. So I used my time as wisely as possible and sought professional help.”

Morgan nodded, pressed his fingers to his mouth and flexed his shoulders to clear his mind.

“I’m very glad that you sought out my assistance,” he said. “I think that these events are very important and very real to you. I’m certain that they appear real to you.”

“They *are* real,” Walker said. He removed his hands from his knee and rubbed his temples. He looked like a man with a severe headache. “They aren’t the result of some mid-life psychosis.”

“Mr. Walker, do you know anything about the subconscious?”

“Please, doctor—”

“No, no, I would like you to hear me out. Now, sometimes a person’s subconscious can begin to act in ways contrary to a person’s conscious beliefs. Sometimes a person’s subconscious can initiate behavior beyond the normal scope of that person’s habits. It’s as if the subconscious is telling us that we need to re-evaluate our motives for certain beliefs. Especially if our habits have been causing us stress, or if we begin to unconsciously question the validity of our beliefs.”

“I know what I believe,” Walker said. “And my beliefs aren’t being compromised by my subconscious. This person, this entity is an *entirely different person*. I don’t know how I can emphasize this enough. He is a different person, and he is taking over my body.”

“Mr. Walker, I believe that you are one person. I don’t believe that there are two people inside of your body. That is impossible. I think that you know this, too, but your... *experiences* have weighed on the credibility of your beliefs. I believe that you’re having an internal debate with yourself because you’re attempting to resolve a personality conflict. This is certainly an extreme way of doing so, but it is in no way unique. There are many cases of personality extremes. Multiple personalities.”

“I do *not* have multiple personalities. I have an invader. And he’s taking over my body.”

Morgan studied Walker over his desk, and debated with himself about how much he should say to the man. There might be a great chance that Walker was suffering an acute affliction, and he did not want to upset him unnecessarily. It was obvious to Morgan that Walker’s problem was seated in his internal conflicts, and that his conservative nature had developed a response to something in his personal history. Examining Walker’s history and the development of his conservative views was essential in determining why the man was conflicted to the point where he would exhibit such extreme traits.

“I have something else,” Walker said suddenly.

He slowly reached into his coat and removed several folded papers. He held them before his eyes for a moment, staring at them as if

they were an order of execution. Then he handed them over the desk to Morgan.

“What are these?”

“Letters,” Walker said. “Just a few days ago he began writing me letters.”

Morgan stared at the folded sheets a moment before opening them.

“They’re not in my handwriting,” Walker said. “You can test that if you wish.”

Morgan said nothing. He flattened the sheets and began reading the messages.

The first sheet simply read: *Hello. Nice to make contact.*

The second sheet: *I think that you may need to change your address.*

The third sheet: *I think that you may need to change your job, too.*

And the final sheet read: *Don’t feel so bad, John. No one will miss you. In fact, they might even start saying nice things about you. Your entire life has been a bust, face it, and it’s no tragedy throwing in the towel. Hell, I might even let you surface from time to time, just to let you see what you’ve been missing. But don’t count on it. Don’t count on it at all.*

Morgan folded the sheets of paper and stared at Walker. He was inexplicably sorry that the man had chosen to characterize himself in this way, and the thought that he was assessing his life as a failure was disturbing.

“Mr. Walker,” Morgan said, “do you sympathize with anything written here?”

Walker appeared as if he’d been struck.

“I don’t agree with anything that is happening to me,” he said, his voice filled with ire. “And I certainly don’t agree with anything in those letters. I’m proud of my life! I don’t have to apologize. Don’t you see what’s happening? Instead of believing me, you’re believing *him*. You’re believing exactly what he wants you believe, because that was his intent. He chose me because my personality was in direct conflict with his. He knows what any psychiatrist would say. That’s part of his plan. That’s his *genius*.”

Now Morgan was certain that Walker was entirely convinced of the truth of his psychosis. Though the man seemed completely rational and composed, he was certainly not presenting a healthy recounting of events. Morgan considered the possibility of committing Walker for a day’s observation, and wondered what the effect of confinement would have on the man.

“I’m almost entirely gone,” Walker said. “It won’t be long now before I never wake up. Don’t you see? This is my body and I don’t want to go. I want to stay, I want this other man to leave. I want to be whole again!”

“I know, Mr. Walker,” Morgan said. “I think that we can help you, but I’m going to need your cooperation.”

“*Please*,” Walker said, and Morgan was inexplicably embarrassed by the fear in his voice.

Morgan smiled the best that he could manage and said, “We’ll help you, don’t you worry.”

Walker sat back in his chair and closed his eyes, evidently trying to control his emotions, trying to silence his fears.

Morgan rubbed his lips emphatically and found a pen. He studied Walker's profile sheet again and wrote a couple of notes in the margin, then placed the letters into the folder. He would have to begin a more thorough dossier, and he would have to look into getting Walker admitted to the state hospital. It was all a very delicate matter, and Morgan raised his head to begin the speech that he'd been rehearsing in his mind.

But he didn't speak.

Instead, after looking up again, he stared silently at Walker, who was now sitting in the chair with his legs spread causally. His coat was open and his tie had been appreciably loosened. He wore a befuddled expression as he stared around the room for an interminable period of time.

"Where am I?"

Morgan searched the expression on Walker's face for a long time. The man seemed genuinely overcome by shock. Then Walker laughed nervously, shook his head and exclaimed brightly.

"It's happened again, hasn't it?" he said.

Morgan sat up in his chair and continued staring. "What has happened?"

"I'm sorry, but I have no idea who you are or what I'm doing here."

"My name is Dr. Kurt Morgan," Morgan said carefully. "I'm a psychiatrist."

Walker leaned back in his chair and laughed again, ostensibly chagrined by the circumstances. The stiff, controlled posture of his body was gone, replaced by a nervous nonchalance that nearly destroyed the effect of his beautiful suit. His mouth remained opened for a moment as his mind ostensibly calculated some confused scheme.

"The bastard actually went to a psychiatrist," he said to the air. He seemed to be thinking intently, his mouth shaping itself into inaudible vowels. Then he stared at Morgan again. "I'm sorry for this, Dr. Morgan, but something has happened to me that I can't quite explain. It seems that someone—some entity—is trying to—how can I possibly explain?"

Morgan reached for his pen again, but realized that he had no idea of what to write. He said, "Is your body being taken over by some other man?"

"Yes, that's it. How did you know?"

"Does this other man use your body when you're asleep? Conduct himself in ways contrary to your personality?"

"Absolutely!" Walker raised his hands in the air and smiled. Then, as if realizing the source of Morgan's mystical knowledge, lost his smile. "He told you all of this, didn't he?"

"*You* told me."

"No, no! Good God, man, don't you see what's happened? Before I could do anything about it he came to see you. He told you that everything happening to *me* was actually happening to *him*. Don't you see? I'm John Walker." Walker tapped his chest to emphasize the point. "I'm the real deal. And before I could see a priest he decided to bring all this nonsense to you to validate his story."

Morgan rubbed his lips with painful intensity. "You were going to see a priest?"

"To be exorcised." Walker's eyes wavered, then set again on Morgan. "What's today's date?"

"Wednesday, the twenty-fifth."

“My God, I’ve been asleep for two days—”

“You were going to have a priest perform an exorcism on you?”

“Absolutely. And, if there’s still time, I’ll have him do it yet.”

Morgan bit his lip and then said, “Mr. Walker, would you please outline all your pertinent experiences for me? From the beginning?”

“I shouldn’t be here. I missed my appointment with Father Karmel.”

“If you would indulge me.”

“My waking time is precious,” he said. “He’s taken so much of it, I feel like I’m hardly in this world anymore.”

“Please, indulge me.”

Walker closed his mouth, then nodded resignedly.

Walker proceeded to tell Morgan a nearly perfect rendition of what he had said a little while before, except in a comfortable colloquial manner in deep contrast to the previous version. He spoke with as much aplomb and surety as he had before, maintaining the impression of the unfortunate victim, except now he was a different person. The only difference in the two stories was that each speaker was the persecuted party.

Morgan scratched his head, uncertain of what to make of the dual statements. In the back of his mind he hoped that this was all some sort of awful practical joke, but he realized, dejectedly, that it was not. He opened the file folder and handed the letters written by Walker to Walker.

“Can you identify these?” he asked.

“Yes, of course,” Walker replied, scanning the sheets. “These are letters he wrote to me while possessing my body. Taunts, I guess.” Walker stared up and rubbed his chin. “He means to do it, Dr. Morgan. He means to take over my body completely and live some weirdo austere life. He means to destroy everything meaningful in my life. What am I going to do?”

“Your previous incarnation seems to think that *you* are the invading entity,” Morgan said hesitantly.

Walker threw up his hands in exasperation. “Of course he said that! Don’t you see how clever he is? It’s part of his *genius*. He knew that I was going to see a priest. He knew that his days were numbered, so he had to act quickly. What would you do if you were him? You’d run to a psychiatrist and have yourself committed. And while you were locked up you could finish the job that you began. Don’t you see how logical it all is? The man is brilliant, and he’ll have my life!”

Walker, thoroughly flustered now, leaned forward and put his face in his hands. He mumbled through his fingers, “Don’t let him commit me. He’ll destroy me. Oh, God. I *have* to find Father Karmel.”

Morgan sat stiffly in his chair, his hands folded on the desk, his eyes focused on the man sitting before him with his face in his hands. He’d spent time with deeply troubled patients before, but this time he couldn’t help but feel a small chill dancing up his spine. *This* version of John Walker seemed as credible as the first version, and now he didn’t know what to believe. If both psychotic incarnations believed the same circumstances were threatening them, which incarnation was the true John Walker? If he’d known the man before—perhaps he could consult Walker’s physician, family, co-workers. Would they know? Even so, who would they prefer?

But—

Walker suddenly dropped his hands and sat erect. A puzzled expression came to his face, then he examined his clothes and quickly straightened his tie and buttoned his coat.

“My God, he was here, wasn’t he?” Walker said uneasily. He stared fiercely into Morgan’s eyes. “What happened?”

Morgan opened his mouth to say something, but nothing emerged. He closed his mouth and watched Walker as the man carefully crossed his legs and smoothed his hands self-consciously over his hair.

“What lies did he tell you?” Walker asked. “God, don’t tell me that you believed him?”

Morgan nodded, then shook his head. He felt entirely confused. “He told me—that is, you told me—essentially the same thing that you told me. Rather, he told me what you told me. Except that he claimed it was *you* who was stealing his body and not the other way around. He told me that he was planning to see a priest before you took over his body and came to see me.”

“A *priest*? I’m not even Catholic.” Walker appeared sincerely bemused. Then his bemusement melted into worry. “Oh, God. Don’t you realize what he’s planning? Instead of letting medical professionals help me rid my body of him, he’s going to waste my time entangling me with superstitious rituals. He knows that I’m aware of his influence, and he knows that I’m trying to rid myself of him. While clergymen are chanting over me and throwing holy water on my head, he’ll have enough time to take over my body completely!”

Morgan felt that he should be writing something down, but for the life of him he couldn’t divine what that might be.

“Don’t let him take me to any priest.” Walker rubbed his neck and then his forehead. He seemed to be trying very much to control his emotions. “The only thing to do is to confine me and study his habits. Find out why he’s doing this and convince him to leave me alone. Lock me up, I don’t care. He’s planning his final maneuvers, and he wants to convince the world that *I’m* the aberration instead of *him*. My only chance is for you to talk to him and convince him to leave.”

“I see,” Morgan said. But he didn’t see. He had absolutely no idea which incarnation of Walker was telling the truth. How could he know without having known the man before? But he was a medical man, and knew the apprehension of the truth was always a matter of patience.

Morgan drummed his fingers on the top of his desk.

And then, through a flush of emotion that brought color to his cheeks, he realized what had been happening. It was evident that John Walker was experiencing a severe psychotic episode, though manifested uniquely and with intelligent design. Neither incarnation was truly Walker: both were the symptoms of a deeply affected personality. Two sides of the same personality, so to speak, and both attempting to manifest full-blown emotional identities within Walker. This was John Walker torn in two, and his subconscious was attempting to keep both versions viable. An easy way to maintain a guiltless existence. Both the prude and the hedonist alive in the same body, separate but equal. This elaborate story of possession—or confiscation, as it were—was simply a means to justify the existence of the condition. Still, some small part of Walker, possibly a voice from the gulf between incarnations, decided to cry out for help, thus explaining Walker’s presence in his office.

Of course, the man would have to be admitted for observation.

Morgan was certain of at least that much.

“Mr. Walker,” Morgan said sighing, “I think that we should move quickly. I want to admit you as soon as possible. Before your other—before the other man makes an appearance. If that’s all right with you?”

Walker smiled grimly, and nodded. “I think that it’s the only way.”

“I’ll have my nurse arrange for transportation. Is there anyone we should notify?”

“My employer, I would think,” Walker said. He sighed. “I have no family to speak of. Dr. Morgan, do you really think that you can help me?”

“I really do, Mr. Walker.” Morgan smiled warmly, ultimately satisfied that his momentary loss of control with his patient had been corrected. For a moment he’d thought that his professional acumen was in question—

Walker nodded again. “It’s for the best, I know.”

“It *is* for the best.”

“Did he really say that he was going to see an exorcist?” Walker said, staring calmly at Morgan.

“Yes, he did,” Morgan said.

Walker smiled thinly. “Imagine that.”