

## Suspicion

“They say he was born with only four fingers.” Dr. Fielding removed his spectacles and massaged the red spots on his nose. “It is interesting, and as medical students you should all take note of this. Even such a minor defect can manifest itself into deep horrors within the human psyche.”

As he spoke, Dr. Fielding stared at Juergens, the shuffling little fellow with whom I shared rooms. Dr. Fielding pointed to the patient huddled in the corner of the cell of the City Insane Asylum. “The police brought him here after they arrested him for molesting a woman in the Bowery. He was screaming, and barking like a dog. They didn’t want to deal with him, so they provided him to us as a specimen. Dr. Sanders has been investigating his case ever since. Apparently his physical defect – though relatively minor – has subjected him to constant ridicule his entire life. At some point his mind just snapped.”

Juergens shifted nervously under Dr. Fielding’s gaze. I alone knew of Juergens’ deformities, not the least of which was that one leg was significantly shorter than the other. Juergens had irritated me since Dr. Fielding arranged for our rooms at the boarding house near the Hospital on the day our medical training began two years ago.

Dr. Fielding had pulled me aside that day. “Collins,” he had said, “Be wary of Juergens’ Germanic nature.”

And now as Dr. Fielding talked, I mentally cataloged many of Juergens' troubling characteristics. Chief among them was a perverse interest in Margaret, the teenage daughter of the owner of the boarding house.

After rounds were over, and after observing shock treatment administered to a mental deficient, we were done for the day. At dinner Juergens took obstinate pleasure in teasing Margaret about a new blouse she was wearing. I found this obvious sexual interest in the young girl disgusting, and attributed it to one of Juergens' other deformities, a defect of the genitals which would be indelicate to describe. I confronted Juergens after dinner, and he pushed me away. Fearing he was finally manifesting his inner rage, I struck him defensively with my walking stick. Though I should have known better, the blow landed on Juergens' temple, staving in the side of his head.

The owner of the boarding house contacted the police, and as I was led to the paddy wagon, I was surprised to see Drs. Fielding and Sanders standing on the sidewalk.

“The experiment worked marvelously,” Dr. Fielding said.

The conversation struck me as curious, and I listened with much interest.

“You are absolutely correct about the human psyche,” Dr. Sanders said. “Even the smallest suspicion can lead to overwhelming mistrust, even hatred. I am surprised, though, that someone of Mr. Collins' intellect would have so easily fallen prey.”

“That is what made the experiment such a success,” Dr. Fielding replied. “If a man with superior intellect could so easily succumb, just imagine what the masses are susceptible to.”

“Indeed,” Dr. Sanders said.

The End