

Special Delivery

I had gone about my business in town as long as I could remember. What this business was is of no particular distinction, for whose business is, in a town like this?

The park (located across from the water treatment facility) where I invariably whiled away many an afternoon was also a destination favored by others. In particular we—that is myself and the other park dwellers—were drawn to the old gazebo that was situated in the center of the grounds. Though badly in need of repainting, this rather large structure had become the nexus for our impromptu gatherings. A few of the regulars I knew by name: Krinkle, the teacher Ms. Brahma, the antique dealer Strader, and the students Groeh and Badger.

“There was a delivery this morning,” Strader suddenly volunteered.

After a pause Krinkle asked the obvious: “Who this time?”

“Klingman.”

“Over on Steele Avenue?”

Strader nodded.

We all nodded.

We were all silent.

Deliveries had begun as far back as there had been a town, perhaps longer. The exact mode of delivery changing through the years, but since its inception the town and its inhabitants have always received the packages.

On the simplest level these deliveries consisted of packages left on the porches and doorsteps of the town's citizenry. Wrapped in nondescript gray paper each package featured the name of the recipient scrawled in something like charcoal or dirt across the covering. A looping twine, also gray, crisscrossed the packages and formed a pleasing bow atop each parcel. While we were all familiar with the traditional markings and workings of the post office and other delivery services—stamps, manilla envelopes, delivery trucks with their drivers vaulting out to leave an item—these gray objects and their method of distribution were a baffling mystery.

To begin with, there was no name or address to indicate the identity of the sender, nor were there any logos or other identifying marks of the company responsible for the deliveries. This led to the surmise by many of the townsfolk that the sender and the delivery service were one and the same. As to the charcoal—or dirt—indicating the recipient's name, it was of a sooty material prone to smudging. This detail of the name being so easily smudged was a quirk of the delivery service that, at least early on, gave the impression of something amateurish about the service. The lettering itself was also highly unprofessional, if not downright childlike. Early theories concerning the nature of the delivery service made much of the style of the writing, attributing the deliveries to either an individual of uneducated background or someone who feigned an uneducated background and was thus thought to be of superior education. The grayish covering presented its own mysteries. It was said to be "coarse like the skin of a snake" but also wispy as if "knitted together from the web of a spider." Whatever its actual composition it definitely was not the pulp of common paper. Also of ambiguous composition was the ubiquitous twine, characterized as being both tough and sinuous, or as one of the townsfolk described it, "like fibrously felted veins." Pulling apart the neatly tied bow the wrapping would drop away to reveal, unfailingly, a black box. The box, unlike the paper-skin or the twine-vein,

was of no exotic substance. Rather, it was run of the mill cardboard, albeit it of an unusual ebony color. Why the sender (or delivery service) abandoned the normal conventions of package delivery in favor of these strange flourishes was, like everything connected to the deliveries, a matter of shadowy speculation.

Despite the odd physical nature of the packages there was far greater puzzlement concerning the method of shipment. The packages themselves were never seen delivered, instead materializing on a citizen's porch or doorstep after one of the town's particularly dense episodes of morning fog, fog that was precipitated by a striking drop in temperature. It was said that multi-colored lights could be seen flashing in the mist before a delivery was made, an omen which differentiated delivery fog from common fog. To my knowledge no one had ever seen a person or vehicle that could definitively be linked to the strange deliveries.

As to the contents of each package there was, on the one hand, much confusion, but also, on the other hand, all too much clarity. The clarity arose not from the motives behind the sending of the items—these were inscrutable—but from each item's usage. Each package contained an object that was to be used towards ending the life of the recipient. To facilitate the termination of one's existence seemed to be the guiding principle behind the machinations of the delivery service. How this outrageous conclusion was arrived at goes deep into the town's history.

Preserved via newspapers, personal diaries, and a rich oral tradition of folklore, the town boasted a deep mine of knowledge concerning its history. The usual factoids were maintained—who was elected, the price of grain, who stole what from who—along with one bizarrely recurring phenomenon: the strange package deliveries. In various forums since the town's inception the deliveries were noted for the weirdness of both their appearance and the sinister metaphysical nature of their contents. Records bespeak of Mr. Meier receiving an unsolicited

dagger, Ms. Flint an unasked-for revolver, and one Dr. Criley an unordered vial of some brownish liquid. In connection with each of these delivered items the fates of each package recipient were also recorded. Mr. Meier, per his wife's diary, is found dead at the edge of a pond, a dagger in his chest; Ms. Flint, according to her sister's letters, is discovered with a fatal bullet wound; Dr. Criley, according to his still extant death certificate, drops dead from some unknown poison. Initial gossip pointed to coincidence and happenstance as explanation for what was surely no more than small town foul play. Sure, it is odd Ms. Flint received a revolver and was then found shot dead, but some despicable individual must have just had it in for her. Ms. Flint—so the gossip went—was too goodly, too salt of the earth, too conventional to have...well, it just had to be murder. With, however, the accumulation of more package related deaths other wilder whisperings began to arise. After the publication of an editorial in the local paper questioning the nature of the deliveries, talk of the delivery service itself being responsible not just for the distribution of the packages but also for the ensuing deaths began to gain currency. A theory circulates that the service is some vaguely defined criminal enterprise that the deceased (even the goodly Ms. Flint) must have been in league with and then run afoul of, resulting in their demise. Or the delivery service was a roving band of killers who knew not their victims but were acting out of mindless, random violence. Then again, perhaps the recipients were all members of some freakish religious cult whose worship and practice had sacrifice as an essential element. As the years passed the basic assumption that the package recipients were murdered was eventually realized to have been wholly false—the evidence to the contrary being too great to ignore or simply wish away. An inescapable conclusion was reached by the townsfolk that plunged them, and us, into the true nightmare of the delivery service: compelled by some unknown force the

deceased had been lead to taking their own lives with the item that was delivered to them. It would seem that to receive a package was to receive annihilation.

It was Ms. Brahma who broke the silence: “So it was Klingman’s turn, that’s not surprising.”

No, I reflected, it’s not surprising. Klingman, if not ideal, would at least have been a betting favorite to receive a package. A bachelor, he had recently suffered a spate of personal setbacks. His dog, a small spotted creature, was fatally struck by a speeding vehicle; the death of the animal, which Groeh and Badger witnessed the burial of, had, as they say, snapped a chord in the man. A day or so later during a powerful thunderstorm, high winds snapped a large limb from a tree in Klingman’s yard, the branch falling and crushing a portion of his small residence, making it smaller still. Amidst this upheaval he had been demoted in his job as principal brick layer to a lesser position; a demotion that affected him as much economically as it did emotionally.

No then, it was not surprising that Klingman received a package, a package said to have contained a length of rope. And later that day, unsurprisingly, Klingman was found hanging from the limb of a tree, the very tree that had contributed to the miniaturization of his residence.

Thus, while the correlation of the packages with the fate of each recipient has long since been accepted, the motives for such an enterprise remained obscure. In some instances, like the case of Klingman, we were somewhat blasé about the event, filing his death in our mental filing cabinets as an expected suicide which made the operations of the delivery service somewhat tolerable. It was, however, the unexpected suicides that have kept us in a state of psychological crisis. Without the consolation of our ability to neatly file all of the dead, these unexpected

deaths left us with only the grotesque reality of a self-made corpse. Mr. Stoope had been one of these specimens. Having risen to the top of his profession at a local financial institution, Mr. Stoope had all the hallmarks associated with happiness: economic success, a large house (some would call a mansion), and a singularly beautiful wife. In fact, during past gazebo gatherings it was not uncommon to encounter Mr. Stoope on one of his lunchtime walks. Briefly halting as he passed us by, Stoope would give the customary salutation of “Good day!” But this greeting was not just given as a matter of course or perfunctorily, he really did seem to think it was a good day. Perhaps, Mr. Stoope even thought *every day is a good day*. So, when the morning of falling temperatures and an unusually dense fog (which may or may not have contained multi-colored flashing lights) fell upon the town it came as a shock to hear that a package had been delivered to the financial professional’s mansion. Mr. Stoope had been delivered a rather large package containing a five-gallon jug of exceedingly viscous liquid, later identified as molasses. It was in this gelatinous goo that he drowned himself. Not that this was the most outlandish of items to have ever been used in one of the towns lengthy history of suicides, for through the years the delivery service has employed a variety of objects, devices, and materials to affect their unknown agenda. Packages have been known to include such items as a deck of cards, a lamp shade, and on one gruesomely memorable occasion, a toothbrush and toothpaste.

Several days after the Klingman incident we (myself and the other park dwellers) again found ourselves sitting in the gazebo where many had begun forming vague stratagems against the delivery service.

“If only we could anticipate a delivery” Krinkle offered, “we could defend ourselves.”

“Defend ourselves how?” barked the gas station attendant Mr. Louis. “You don’t own a gun and you don’t know karate.”

“Those aren’t the only ways to defend ourselves. If you knew the next delivery location was your own, you could immediately vacate the premises, pass the property off to some unsuspecting sod and let them receive the package.”

“Just vacate the premises? You think it is that easy. The delivery service has been in operation since the town’s beginning. Do you think nobody else had thought to simply leave?” responded Mr. Louis in an annoyed tone.

“I guess I could buy a gun and start taking karate lessons,” mumbled Krinkle.

It was sometime later that I found myself idling in the gazebo with only the student Groeh present.

“Badger has been taken,” Groeh offered up distractedly.

“Taken?” I inquired.

“By the delivery service.”

“You mean he received a package? When?”

Groeh looked at me bewildered. Actually, as a whole, he looked rather disheveled; his hair had certainly not been combed and his clothes were badly caked with mud. After staring at me for some time he whispered, “No..taken...*taken*.”

“Groeh, I don’t understand. How was Badger taken by the delivery service?”

It was then that Groeh launched into an explanation of what he and Badger had been up to for the previous couple of months and most intensively, the last couple of days. Neglecting their studies the two embarked on a concentrated effort to unravel the riddle of the delivery service. To this end each applied his own individual methodology to solving the mystery.

As Groeh told it, he was more analytical than Badger—far more logical. His method, which could loosely be termed a scientific method, first involved gathering hard facts on the phenomenon of the delivery service. Groeh examined the dates of the deliveries as far back as records could accurately be trusted. “I had hoped to find some pattern as to intervals of time between deliveries.” As it turned out the intervals of time were utterly random. Using other datapoints he looked for other corollaries in the occurrences of the packages. Was there a greater or lesser frequency with regard to season? No, there was not. Was there a geographic anomaly as to the location of deliveries which made certain areas more susceptible to deliveries? Again, no, there was not. “Since,” Groeh explained, “there was no pattern to the deliveries regarding the outside environment—the geography of the area or the season—I suspected there might be some detectable design as to who received one.” With this new strand of inquiry Groeh assembled a vast collection of information on the various ‘customers’ of the delivery service. Names, ages, dates of birth, occupations and other biographical details were compiled on individual notecards. In an effort to puzzle out a delivery pattern the notecards, numbering in the hundreds, could then be arranged, combined, and recombined in any number of ways. “Was occupation, marital status, sex, political leaning or hair color a factor in the plans of the delivery service?” Groeh asked me.

“I’m guessing, no, they were not.”

“For all my powers of analysis,” continued Groeh, “I could find no design behind the delivery service.” After months, and most intensively the last couple of days, of studying the phenomenon, Groeh could only state what we already knew: that on mornings of drastically falling temperatures and unusually dense fog (and perhaps flashing, multi-colored lights) a delivery would be made.

After concluding these remarks on his failure to penetrate the mystery of the delivery service I could see Groeh shiver slightly, his unkempt hair wavering with the motion. He lingered silently for a moment and then resumed.

“Badger tried a wholly different approach, something suited to his mystically leaning character. His method was to approach the delivery service from a mystical perspective.” As Groeh explained it, Badger was far less logic driven than himself. This is not to imply that Badger was in any way less rigorous, only that his investigation would involve the use of more esoteric practices. By delving into his own subconscious Badger had the notion that he could access some deeper level of understanding that would uncover the ultimate nature of the delivery service. For this purpose the keeping of a dream log became essential. Kept for months, and most intensively the last couple of days, this log contained typical (Badger might have said archetypical) dream scenarios: falling from a great height, flying to a great height, being chased by an unknown force or monster, etc. Badger would then consult various psychological texts regarding the meaning of dreams with the hope that a recurrent dream or set of dreams would symbolically uncover the nature of the delivery service, a kind of collective subconscious spilling of the beans. “I won’t bother asking you if dreams disclosed the ultimate nature of the delivery service,” Groeh interjected, “but Badger persisted with his mystical perspective.” Setting aside his dream readings Badger turned to even more mystical, if not simply more outlandish, methods. Tomes of arcane religious writings, books on the occult, collections of ancient folklore and other cabalistic ledgers became his guides. And it was from these sources that he drew his practices: the burning of a certain type of herb mixture on a certain date at a certain time of night, an incantation in a forgotten language, the graveyard wanderings. At his most extreme, and most intensively in the last couple of days, Badger began taking copious

amounts of hallucinogenic drugs in the belief that the resulting altered state of consciousness would send him on some sort of “vision quest” that would tear away whatever veil the delivery service was hiding behind. “Obviously none of that nonsense got him anywhere,” Groeh mused with a note of irritation, “and that seemed like an end to it. But the other day as we were walking down Oak Street debating our next course of action, if there was one to take, the most ridiculous of possibilities presented itself to us: we had stopped in front of the post office. Badger and I looked at each other and without a word he opened the door and walked in.”

Here Groeh paused, a little too theatrically for my tastes. I glanced over to the water treatment facility, its structures and reservoirs neatly framed between the beams of the gazebo.

Groeh shook himself as if to regain his train of thought and then continued with his story. “Perhaps, we both seemed to be thinking, this really was just a front. An elaborate bait and switch on the part of the sinister delivery service to brazenly masquerade as *the real post office*? Who knew what levels of deceit the illicit service was capable of? Perhaps we could turn the tables and expose the service by taking *it* by surprise? To tell the truth, both of us were a bit tired and fed up. And, I suppose, a little out of our minds by then. Anyway, it seemed like direct confrontation was our only remaining option. Upon entering nothing out of the ordinary presented itself: it was a real post office. To the left was the section devoted to customer P.O. boxes while in the center of the room a small “island” in which slips of paper for various postal related services were kept. ‘Inspect those boxes,’ Badger demanded as he gestured to the rows of hanging envelopes and boxes available for purchase. Not really knowing what I was inspecting for I went over to the merchandise. ‘And?’ Badger said with an intensity out of proportion to the action I was performing. ‘Nothing out of the ordinary,’ I replied as I picked up a do it yourself folding box, ‘standard issue postal goods.’ Badger simply smiled. Simultaneously we glanced

over to the counter area behind which one would expect to see at least one if not two to three postal employees standing at the ready to receive customers. Here, however, none could be found. We cautiously approached the counter. Again, nothing out of the ordinary: an array of pens to sign documents with, a scale to the side of each worker space, cash registers and other material necessary for the conducting of postal business. Behind the counter space were cubicles filled with various packages and envelopes, none of which were gray. Also present were a couple of wheeled hampers filled with still more packages and envelopes. We scanned the area looking for something amiss. ‘Ha!’ Badger shrieked and ran to the side of the counter where a portion of the tabletop was hinged in order to permit ingress and egress from the workers’ space to the area for customers. Before I could react, Badger had lifted the hinged portion and with a speed out of character for his admittedly somewhat sickly student frame, he darted through and raced parallel behind the counter. At the end of the counter was a wall with an open doorway; it was through there that Badger disappeared.” Groeh again paused, before solemnly adding, “A mistake.” Alone in the post office Groeh peered over the counter into the doorway that Badger vanished through. Spying nothing, he cautiously moved to the hinged tabletop, lifted it, and proceeded to follow Badger’s lead.

Walking through the doorway Groeh expected to encounter some other area of operations concerning the post office. Instead, he found himself at one end of a short hallway, the other of which terminated in a gray door, still vibrating with the residue of movement. After a few tentative steps Groeh was directly in front of the door, which he gently eased open. Before him lay a luxuriance of greenery, quite unlike anything he had ever seen in town. “Tropical” Groeh suddenly interjected as he again, to my mind quite theatrically, gripped my arm, “if not supra-tropical.” Before I could inquire as to what species of plant life this prefix might refer to, he

continued with his story. There was a short narrow dirt path, Groeh explained, leading through the growth. Following the path, he quickly emerged into a large clearing where he found Badger poised before a structure of some kind. This structure was not quite the post office, not the *real post office*, but was somehow oddly reflective of it. In some obscure fashion it mirrored the appearance of the real post office without exactly duplicating it. Some features had been stripped away—unnecessary architectural flourishes—that made this post office appear less inviting as a place of business. Pared back, this building was an abstraction of such a business: a featureless mask of a post office. Groeh approached Badger who was standing a few feet from the opening of this other post office. According to Groeh the bricks and windows were coated in some glistening substance which, upon closer examination, he discovered to be very fine drops of water. Accumulating on the outer surfaces, these droplets gave the building the disturbing appearance of sweating. “It is artificial...an *artificial post office*” Badger murmured before shrieking hysterically “I won’t have it! I won’t have an artificial post office...one post office! *One real post office!*” Shouting, he raced through the entrance. But before the door could fully close his bellowing was abruptly cut short.

Groeh now lost all theatricality. The instant the shrieking terminated, Groeh reported, the building grew colder. The door handle telegraphing a chill through his fingers to his entire body. Ominously, the temperature dropped—an omen was at hand. Fog began to rise around the building. The shocking rapidity of its appearance was made more shocking by its incredible density, for despite being within a step of entering the structure Groeh could see absolutely nothing inside. As the mist accumulated it congealed to such opacity that the building itself, which Groeh was still touching, became obscured. There was a sudden scream, piercing and

hollow. The source of the cry was in no doubt. “It was, *it was*, the voice of Badger, but a Badger altered, not just hurt or possibly dying, but a Badger...” here Groeh’s voice trailed off.

“When the fog cleared, I was outside the real post office.”

“And the artificial post office?” I probed.

“Gone.”

For some time we sat silently in the gazebo, the workings of the water treatment facility murmuring in the distance. Groeh’s story had a curious effect on me. Its highly theatrical presentation and the concept of the *artificial post office* lodged in my mind as though a tumor. Was this the true source of the delivery system which had plagued my town for generations? I soon found myself wandering outside the real post office...even when I had no legitimate postal business to conduct. On several occasions I even wandered in, feigning some urgent matter while surreptitiously surveying the interior. What I found was unsurprising: it was a real post office; there were workers accepting envelopes and packages from a steady, if not voluminous, stream of customers. Fellow townspeople entered and exited without incident, some even stopping to chat briefly with myself.

It was at one of our later gazebo gatherings that I began to realize the full extent to which the story of Badger and the *artificial post office* had invaded my thinking. At this gathering were a couple of the usuals, Krinkle and Mr. Louis, as well as the newcomer Mr. Droste.

“He has lost it,” Krinkle declared.

“Without a doubt,” Mr. Louis echoed, “without a doubt.”

My mind recoiled; who was this “he” they were speaking of? Surely it was not I, but only of Groeh they were referring to when speaking of someone losing it. In the last couple of weeks, since Badger was ‘taken,’ Groeh had grown increasingly unsteady. Instead of entering the gazebo with the rest of us, he had taken to slowly circling the gazebo, arms gesticulating wildly. “I must know!” he would repeatedly mutter while making his flapping rounds. Whomever happened to be gathered in the gazebo proper—whether it was Mr. Louis, Krinkle or myself—did nothing to discourage this behavior or, as they say, try to “talk him down.” Instead, we did our best to simply ignore him. Of late this became increasingly difficult as the mumblings grew in both volume and speed. Gaining a howling momentum, Groeh’s “I must know” merged into a single sound, a tonal current that encircled the gazebo.

It was during this time that I noticed a shift within myself. While earlier I would have wholeheartedly endorsed the supposition of Groeh losing it, I could not deny the same need coalescing within me: *I must know*. I could not dislodge this thought from my brain. Though, I reflected, I could modify it to my own methodology.

Slowly I took this *I must know* and reshaped it into an idea that might grant me the release I so feverishly desired. I became consumed by a new thought: surrender to the delivery service, finally be free of its influence by way of acceptance. Instead of fearing, like the rest of the townsfolk, the possibility of receiving a package from the delivery service, I began to actively wish for such a visitation.

As my own strategy for dealing with the delivery service percolated, Groeh was also plotting another course of action. But his plan went beyond mere wishing to, like before, mounting some actual challenge to the delivery service. *His* desire was still to unravel the

mysteries of the delivery service, to confront its deepest workings. How ill-fortune favors some!
For here Groeh's desire was not disappointed.

Groeh initially took up the strategy he and Badger had devised: direct confrontation with the delivery service via the real post office. This plan, however, was thwarted. On multiple occasions he made his way to the real post office only to find the doors locked, a sign hanging on the window:



Then one morning while at his house contemplating his next move, Groeh felt the temperature begin to drop. *Despite my wishes it was Groeh not I that was to receive a package.* Amidst the swirling fog, Groeh emerged from his door. With a black marker he hastily scrawled across the gray wrappings of the package that had been left the simple phrase: "return to sender." He then quickly ducked back inside. Knowing of my now intensely personal interests in the delivery service Groeh telephoned me. Making my way through the thinning fog I arrived at his home, noting the package and the scribbled instructions. Gesturing for me to come in, he revealed what had taken place and then stationed himself at the front window, holding the curtains slightly apart for a better view. Thinking of nothing to say, I took up a similar position, parting the curtains and looking out on what was now a sunny afternoon.

It was within a couple of hours that the unprecedented occurred. Never *in the light of day* had the temperature ever changed so radically. Neither of us spoke for we both knew what

followed. As the fog materialized and writhed about in the street before us, a strange feeling welled up inside me. I could not, nor can I to this day, put a definite contour to that feeling. An unwholesome salvation seemed to be born within and without me. I was enveloped in this sensation when Groeh touched my shoulder and maniacally whispered: “The package is being returned.”

Recovering from my reverie (or whatever it was) I re-focused my attention on the now empty porch. Before I could voice anything regarding what had transpired, Groeh was out the door and bounding down the steps. I followed.

While neither Groeh nor I could see the package, *he* knew where it was heading: the real post office, a place which I was now reconceptualizing as the *so-called real post office*. Arriving at our destination we were greeted with:



Entering, we found not a soul: no customers, no workers. Groeh deftly lifted the hinged counter and made his way to the operational side of the post office; he then disappeared down the small corridor last traversed in the company of Badger. As I followed, the phrase *the unrevealed post office* spontaneously entered my mind. Down the hallway I came upon a closing gray door. Proceeding through I stood amid a dense jungle, a supra-tropical jungle, with a narrow path guiding my direction through the foliage. In the clearing I found Groeh staring transfixed at the strange structure he had described to me, its sweating surfaces moistening the surrounding

air. I cautiously approached, half expecting to find him with his eyes gouged out, murmuring some Latin incantation.

“This is it. The artificial post office.”

I studied the structure for a short time, this mocking reconstruction of the building we had known as the real post office, this *so-called artificial post office*. Hesitating briefly, our apprehension was overcome by our desire to know something true about the delivery service. Entering we found the interior was much the same as the exterior: like the so-called real post office and yet unlike it. The humidity inside increased to an incredible level and I perspired as though I had been engaged in some strenuous physical exercise. Something about the walls caught my attention. Moving closer I could see fine veiny growths covering the surfaces, a kind of rhizomatic network gently lacing in and out of the plaster. Peering even closer I could see a series of very small holes located along this webwork. Though we both stood silently, little popping sounds could be heard ping-ponged around the room. These tiny apertures were intermittently bursting in small reports, followed up by the dispersion of a fine spray of water. These droplets hung in the air for a moment and then faded vaporously, briefly forming miniature swatches of fog. *It's not cold at all* I briefly thought. As before, in the *so-called real post office*, the hinged counter beckoned us on. It was much heavier than it looked, for this counter required our combined strength to lift. Behind the counter we found a familiar doorway down which a familiar hallway terminated in a familiar gray door.

What we thought we would find beyond the door would be pointless to suggest; for my own part, I had not thought of anything. What we did find was a more temperate climate. The surrounding vegetation losing much of its wild luxuriance in favor of a mix of woody pines and sturdy redwoods. We made our way down a vaguely designated path that was almost totally

obscured by overhanging branches. Along this path we made a gruesome discovery: the decaying body of Badger. With a bit of his old analytical self returning, Groeh knelt for a closer look, then pointed to Badger's left and right arm. I followed his directing motion and could see a veiny network running over the now exposed bones, tiny holes dotting the strange webbing. We did not linger about the body for long, both of us fearing that some unnatural suspiration might occur. Besides, not far off we could see the trees giving way to an open space. "The mystery of the delivery service," Groeh whispered.

Making our way along the ill-defined trail we exited the woods and were deposited into a grassy area where a cobblestone walkway had been neatly laid. Carelessly strewn about the path was an array of gray packages. In the near distance we could see the familiar water treatment facility, its great reservoir of water glistening in the sunlight. We advanced upon it. Several mammoth sized pumps and turbines connected the reservoir to the facilities building, a nondescript rectangular warehouse type of structure. Again, the phrase, or now concept, the *unrevealed post office* crossed my mind. Groeh moved to the edge of the reservoir, close enough to peer into the mirror like stillness of the water. As if triggered by some silent alarm, the reservoir water began to slowly churn. At first it was nothing more than a subtle, arbitrary motion, as if winds from differing directions were rippling the surface. But then gradually, very, very gradually, some apparent organizing force began to take hold; not without the water, but within. A routine of motion clicked into swirling place while just beneath the surface other *things* could be seen. Small flashes of light, at first what I mistook for surface reflections, blinked up from the depths. Increasing in frequency, each flashing light was a unique color pulsating to its own rhythm. The water continued to churn, gathering momentum in a now definite counter-clockwise rotation. Born of this incessant turning a small vortex in the pool was forming. Groeh

crept closer to the reservoir's edge. Wilder the water spun and madder the lights blinked. All the while a low, moaning sound secreted itself out of the atmosphere. At first it was only an ambient background noise. But then this formless resonance began to take on the qualities of suggestive coherence. Unmistakably it was congealing into articulation, becoming a voice of some kind. By this time Groeh was kneeling at the water's edge, slowly extending one hand over the surface.

The *unrevealed post office* entered my mind and I could see—I knew—that the same was in Groeh's mind.

The voice continued its mounting organization and was now definitely speaking words, though I could not make them out. I pondered for a moment on the strangeness of the sound. It was not just a voice, but rather a legion of voices. Louder and clearer the voices became. What was it that was being spoken? Over and over the voices chanted, ultimately resolving into intelligibility:

“Return to sender.”

In that instant Groeh was absorbed into the pool.

How else to describe what occurred? Groeh was assimilated? Digested? Who knows the workings of a special delivery world? Whatever took Groeh also took the whirlpool, the lights, and the voices...it had taken with it the whole of the *unrevealed post office*.

I made my way from the water treatment facility, down the cobblestone path, and through the *so-called artificial post office*, ultimately passing through the *so-called real post office* as well.

The gazebo gatherings continued, minus Groeh. I did not enlighten the rest of the group as to what I had seen or experienced. Groeh wished to penetrate the mysteries of the delivery service and by doing so deliver himself from it. He could not. Groeh could only receive the package that was meant for him and be delivered into the service. My investigation was equally fruitless, though no less enlightening. Though I continued to wish for a package from the delivery service I now knew it was not really a wish that I could ever really have for myself, let alone fulfilled—it could only ever be what the delivery service wished for me.