

## ***Warning* by Marek Technik**

*Translated by Karolína Klibániová*

Caroline was disappointed to find out that her coworkers and friends, her sisters included, were mostly trying to offer her a consolation of sorts. But to what end? Wasn't there still a battle to be fought? There would always be time for consolations later. If this was the best they could do, they would do better to stay quiet. The first person to really catch her off guard was her mother. The moment Caroline told her about her unfolding misfortune, her mother gaped at her in consternation. She sat down and paused for a while, thinking something through, subsequently turning pale despite clutching onto her cup, her stiff hands a heat conductor for the warm, dark liquid inside – a superficial yet significant commonality of their strange bond.

“It doesn't have to be regular cancer. It could be a viral infection.”

“What?” Caroline started and trained her attention on a possibility she was sure would yield no results, unable to stop herself.

The way she was configured, her body instantly accepted any flicker of hope, even if it was a false spark reflecting desperately off the glass door to her mental furnace. She swallowed dryly and resisted the urge to take a sip, overwhelmed by the bizarre feeling that she had to prevent the spark from being extinguished by a cheap sensory comfort. The thought flashed through her mind that only a tortured body could tune in and concentrate the right way.

“It's been happening to people, a virus being transmitted to them on purpose, either through spoiled water, food or through the TV.”

Caroline pursed her lips and swallowed again, this time taking a sip. “Where'd you hear that?”

“Well,” Mrs. Kohout nodded thoughtfully, “they're saying it's...well, the devil's virus. It can spread through radio waves coming from the TV, the computer or through chips. It can affect our food. You could get poisoned and end up dying. It can even look like cancer, among other things.”

Caroline's stomach turned, making her disappear into the bathroom. Instead of using it to its full potential, she just splashed her face and attempted to drink from the tap, the water nearly gushing. When she returned, Mrs. Kohout was ready, having looked up a crucial resource page on the Internet. She began reading it out to her daughter:

“Warning! The Satanists have struck again. Yesterday at 6:00 p.m., they took our internet down, so I could not send off this important blog post. Thankfully, Johanna, the others and I initiated a prayer session to ward off the Evil One. All we had to do was band together and repeat the ‘Prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus’ fifty times and the internet went back online!

The truth cannot be silenced. This is vital information for all. The Evil One now operates through his entourage of fallen devil-worshipping Masonic scientists who we learned about thanks to the revelation of our Beloved Mother. St. Mary came to Johanna in a dream on Monday night and informed her of the Evil One’s latest schemes. The so-called scientists from the black temple on the Mountain of God (Satan deliberately builds his black temples in places consecrated to God in order to desecrate them! But he shall pay!) have developed a dangerous vaccine that acts like a virus. They are injecting it into people, most recently masquerading it as a flu vaccine. We have intel that it has made its way into our food, especially certain food items that have to undergo ‘quality inspection,’ a process being passed off as part of the European Union’s food quality assurance. It is a dangerous, synthetic, multidimensional virus that changes the nature of the infected. First it causes abdominal pain and migraines, and if immediate (!) action to counter it is not taken, the effects of the virus will intensify. We have discovered that their goal is to possess the infected and alter their personalities. That is how these clusters of devil-worshipping Masons are able to gain more and more followers! If the infected body resists, it can gradually die off. Admittedly, that might be the better option, the alternative being becoming their servant, a walking corpse, a so-called zombie of the devil-worshipping Masonic cult, condemned to willingly participate in all of their awful atrocities, starting with cannibalism!

Beware! Some so-called ‘doctors’ are on *their* side! Better take to your heels if you encounter one of them. They will try to tell you that you have come down with the flu or another illness and they will prescribe you more of their black ‘medicine.’ But we already know that it is their latest satanic cancer! If you get infected (or preventatively, even if you’re asymptomatic – you never know!), we recommend you have your house prayed over and, if possible, blessed by a priest. This should, if nothing else, subdue the disease and bring it to the so-called state of latency (once that happens, advice should be sought on how to proceed further – email our Divine Help Center). But be careful, they have managed to sway numerous priests! In addition to a series of prayers that will shoot down the wicked deeds of the Evil One like a machine gun (Johanna, the others and I can vouch for this!), we recommend you get a scapular (but beware of dark imitations – their ranks are indeed capable of such tricks) and place the one and only true Mark of God the Father inside. If you have not yet, you can print it out [HERE](#). Always keep the Scapular and the Mark on you and their schemes will not stand a chance.

The science these satanic Masons possess is more advanced than it may seem – they hide their achievements from others so that they can strike unexpectedly using all their horrific means! Just like yesterday when they used black waves to take down our internet. But we can handle them because God’s power is on our side and the Evil One cannot triumph over the Lord. This is a message to their earthly leaders: We know about you now! The truth cannot be silenced!”

Joe Kohout paused for a moment and looked at Caroline. Then she read out the postscript, partly for the sake of seeing things through to the end whenever possible, partly for her daughter’s greater good:

“You are invited to attend our upcoming prayer session at the Divine Assistance Center in Warnfield, 5 Tansy St.”

Caroline felt like she had just had a mental enema. She looked at the header of the peculiarly informed paper, which read: Martha Post, *God’s Help Bulletin*. A cold wave washed over her mind, its current sweeping away all her feeble mental inventions: No *furnace*, no flicker of the last remaining *spark* of hope, no pompous ideas about tortured and focused bodies. Nothing but an undefined, vague hum. At that moment, for the first time in her thirty-six years on Earth, Caroline had an epiphany, a sort of a revelation of a certain degree of reality, or a life-changing realization the consequences of which were as yet impossible to see.

It was as if she had gone about her life believing she was living in a royal palace but then suddenly discovered that the palace was in fact just the mudroom, and that the throne was just a cabinet-side stool. All these ideas about herself and her role in the world, about John, about his illness. She had viewed her life as a stage play, a story of which she was an active co-creator and the *Protagonist* – everything that happened to her was an important piece of the narrative. Life – the instruction manual: A vast and complicated labyrinth of trials that can only be overcome by the greatest and brightest. The reality: More of a series of silly stories that are too easy to fall for – all it takes is a little togetherness. After all, who doesn’t believe the collective mythologies they share with their loved ones at least a little bit? First it was Caroline the *Prophet of the East*, then Caroline the *Gifted Cum Laude Engineer* who was going to leave her mark on the world. Then it became Caroline the successful *Wife & Mother*, a brilliant homemaker and problem solver. And the current chapter? First it will be Caroline the *Carer* and then Caroline the *Widow & Heroic Fighter Against the Satanic Masonic Contagion*. If there is a higher purpose to the story of her life, then it has taken on the form of an inept joke. Did she feel *cheated*? That may not be the right word to describe it – *cheating* is part of the same game, it implies the breaking of rules, and is therefore just another illusion.

Caroline might have wanted to say at that moment that she felt like she had been punched in the stomach, but that wouldn’t have been very accurate either. Firstly, she had probably never been punched in her stomach, apart from a minor altercation with a classmate

in elementary school that left her without consequences and that she no longer even remembered. Secondly, what she felt following her initiatory epiphany was nothing like pressure. No distorting energy – neither physical nor psychological. It was formless, or rather visually unfathomable, yet it was something close to a sort-of fractal accretion in space. It was a personal, inner mass consisting of something alien, something directly imperceptible that kept decimating in size, microsecond by microsecond. That was where the unimaginability of it lay – each second she attempted to grasp this inner thing using her imagination was replaced with another second in which the elusive shape grew incredibly larger, the change in size so substantial that it was completely beyond her previous perception of it. On top of that, the shape kept growing faster and faster. Caroline remembered laying in the hospital after having a hernia repair surgery when she was little and entering this feverish state, but the connection to her childhood experience just flashed and disappeared before she could capture it in her mind and process it properly. It occurred to her, of course, that this must be how the primordial universe expanded in its early inflationary phase. What puzzled her about it in particular and made her weirdly nauseous was the simple fact that despite the nearly physical sensation indicating it was happening inside her, her body remained light and unchanging, as if it were floating freely, with no pressure being applied to it, as if it found itself in a different, virtual, parallel dimension along with her mother, the whole room and all the space outside the window, and as if that parallel dimension overlapped with the formless madness of the reality only through a strange optical illusion.

“My sweet Caroline,” Mrs. Kohout spoke her daughter’s name in a tone fit for someone reading out a list of survivors. She patted her hand and fixated on her with a watery gaze tinted with a mixture of tentatively expectant empathy and pity. Caroline, leaning over her seated mother uneasily and looking pale as she did so, realized she hadn’t said anything in a while. Mrs. Kohout was seriously worried – it was no joke to her, of course. Caroline eyed the chocolate-dipped cookies in the middle of the coffee table arranged on a plate like neatly knocked-over dominoes. A big, fleshy bluebottle fly was crawling along the edge of one of them. Caroline watched the insect’s movements and pauses as it inspected the humble treats her mother had carefully laid out before her visit, its forelimbs padding over the sweets mere moments after possibly examining cat poop outside. Or something worse. Her mind flashed back to the plastic swatter she would use to slay fly raiders like a huntress when she was little. Surely, it was still somewhere in Mrs. Kohout’s kitchen. The trick was to always put enough force into the swat. But even a lighter blow would be enough to stun a regular-sized fly, at least for a little while. The fly would fall to the ground and little Caroline would finish it off with a final whack of the swatter. Or a slipper. If the stunned fly fell onto a surface where decorations in the form of insect smears would be inappropriate, she would take a dish sponge and use it to pick up the motionless body to wash it down the drain. However, when it came to bluebottle

flies, different rules applied. If she didn't swing the polypropylene grid of the swatter vigorously enough, the bugger wouldn't get knocked out; it would continue levitating its heavy-duty body, unphased, swimming through the air in a direction dictated by the algorithm of its insect brain. You had to get a good swing and a sharp smack in. As far as Caroline recalled, the fly's body would then succumb to shear deformation, causing it to flatten into an unshapely mass that was far from the scientifically analytical depiction of disassembled parts in the three-dimensional Cartesian coordinate system she was used to seeing in natural history, engineering, or scientific publications. The body would mostly get torn away from the large compound eyes, parts of it would get crushed and parts would remain intact, save for the shell being cracked and fluid leaking out of it, the wings stuck at an odd angle. Alternatively, the fly would remain firmly pressed into the grid and Caroline would have to remove it using a toothpick or a match. She imagined a fly blown up to human proportions and it reminded her of the work of Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere, whose exhibition she had attended in Vienna with her husband a few years prior – the human and animal statues on display were deformed to such an extent that while she could make out their original bodies, they appeared stripped of all life forms, leaving nothing but their plastic, material essence. They were like large, hardened lumped-up bits: Human cobblers.

“Eventually, it's going to work out one way or another. God will take care of us,” her mother added intuitively.

Her daughter sat down at the table without answering, swatted the fly away with a quick swipe of the hand, and took a bite out of a cookie. She had never felt further apart from her mother.

A strange, low scratching sound pulled her out of her memories. It was as if someone somewhere was quietly and stealthily working away at a delicate material with a tiny burin. Caroline did not suffer from any particularly notable phonetic idiosyncrasies – for example, she didn't really mind generally abhorred sounds like chalk scraping against a chalkboard. Based on her music-listening habits, many of her acquaintances might have said that she actually sought out audible discomfort bordering on terror. Strangely, however, she didn't take too well to the sound of folded paper being smoothed along the edge with a fingernail. Or the sound of furniture being shuffled around on soft carpet. This low, scratching sound, which she hadn't encountered before as far as she could remember, had a similar effect on her, causing tiny chills to hop down her back. The sound repeated eleven times and then stopped. Caroline Mapal was unsure of whether it was coming from the inside or the outside – so she made her way to a cracked-open window and centered her mind on sensory perception. But the strange sound was gone. She did spot a young couple who had been kissing on the corner of the intersection for a good several minutes. It seemed to her like the two would stay fused together forever. Both had short hair, his dark, hers bleached at the top and red at the tips. He was

wearing brown corduroys and a black T-shirt, she was wearing a light blue sweatshirt, short red shorts, and green knee socks – even though it was September, it was evidently still quite warm. From the distance, they appeared to be about fifteen or sixteen, maybe older. They had probably taken their shared route from school together before reaching this critical point of separation. The longer the performance went on, fueled by their endless play of tongues, the harder it was for Caroline to tear her gaze away. She was sure the two would see each other again tomorrow and that they probably had plenty of time to themselves, yet they were acting as if this was their last moment together. Caroline wondered whether it was genuine passion that was driving them to act like this, or if they were putting on a bit of a show for those around them, as well as for themselves, imitating shaky snippets of scripts on romantic themes that had been engraved in their minds over the last few years and shaped their sappy little souls. She did not mean to spy on them, but she found the progression of their make-out session so fascinating that she had unwittingly instructed herself to keep at her observation post until the two pulled apart. It occurred to Caroline that both of them must be teeming with life and health. And with ignorance of cosmic proportions: they must feel immortal and invincible.

It struck her that this would soon concern Tobias as well. Maybe much sooner than she had originally thought. What did Caroline actually know about her son? On second thought, while all hopes for winning *Parent of the Year* award might have gone, there was a positive side to this: Tobias would be fully grown in a few years, so there wasn't that much left she could mess up on her own. What was *she* like at that age? Had she also ignored all the uncertainties of the physical world that could rub off on her? Possibly – she couldn't say for sure what her state of mind was like back then. Yet it wasn't so long ago. It occurred to her that the distribution curve indicating the individual amount of formative knowledge and beliefs that can become so deeply embedded in a person that it's impossible to get rid of them is likely to peak before the age of twenty or so. Maybe twenty-five, considering the way the country's education system is set up. Fundamental experience and knowledge can come practically at any time, but the older we get, the rarer it becomes. Sudden epiphanies, like the one recently experienced by Caroline Mapal, are really such unique and interesting phenomena that they would make for a great novel. However, as Caroline, who actually quite enjoyed preoccupying herself with memories, had correctly suspected, childhood is the most crucial formative period in life, as that is when sensitivity to stimuli is at its highest and the mind is like fresh playdough. Take faith, for example: Once Caroline started believing in something, her conviction would never fully change. Even if common sense presented her with the best-possible counterevidence, the strongest-possible falsification of her original hypothesis. Perhaps because faith is not really a hypothesis, but something stronger, more substantial. Caroline recalled how Irene, her eldest sister, once told her that if she did not close her eyes for ten seconds at a time and cover them with her hands at regular intervals while reading so that not

a single photon of irritating light could penetrate her thin eyelids, her vision would quickly deteriorate. From then on, Caroline did so whenever she read a book or an article and she would probably keep doing it even if she lived in an ultra-advanced future and had artificial eyes put in. Because who knows – after all, scientific knowledge comes from hypotheses, the strengths and weaknesses of which lie in perpetual uncertainty. As long as they are scientifically unchallenged, they remain valid. Faith, however, is much stronger because rooted right at its core is resistance to doubt.