

# Citrus Greene

## Bullseye Breach Victim

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## Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 28, 2013

I looked up at the stars after sunset, like I always do on crisp, clear nights, and waited for my friend, Orion, to rise in the southern sky. After my brother died in a car accident last month, Orion became my only friend. Which is a sad commentary on my sad life. Most twenty-two-year-old women have a place to live and maybe a husband. Maybe, someday, I'll also have some of those things.

My brother always teased me about my fascination with the night sky. "Cit, stop looking up at stars and start looking forward in your life." Mark was like that. He was a great big brother, even though I was born a few years before him, He was always looking after me, instead of the other way around. I miss him, even more than my parents.

I went to the library a few months ago, and looked up Orion on the Internet. I don't remember what month that was. March maybe? There was still snow on the ground in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Orion disappeared over the southwestern horizon shortly after sunset, so it was probably March.

I discovered Orion is a masculine name. So, for me, the constellation, Orion, with his trusty sword, is my dependable boyfriend, and I look forward to spending a few minutes with him every clear night during the winter. Especially now that Mark is gone. But nothing can fill the hole Mark left when he died.

Orion is there, every night, even when I can't see him through the clouds. I like to dream about flying in a rocket and finding a planet circling around one of his stars. Citrus Greene, interplanetary explorer. It sounds exotic.

But not tonight. Tonight is special, right here on earth in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Ruth Family Center is feeding us turkey for dinner, so I can't spend too much time outside with my friend. Besides, it's cold, and I want a hot meal and a warm bed. That's not too much to ask, is it?

Oh—why am I starting a diary at age twenty-two? Because in our meeting yesterday, my counsellor in the Ramsey County Social Services Office said I should keep one. She wants me to keep notes about what I do and feel every day. She even gave me this nice book to write in, and a pen that tucks neatly into the spine so I won't lose it. She called it a learning tool and said it

might help me sort out whatever it is I'm supposed to sort out, so maybe I can get a job that pays enough for me to live somewhere nice. That's why I'm writing down my thoughts tonight.

Orion, I'll catch up with you after dinner.

#####

I am full. We ate turkey, of course, with mashed potatoes, gravy, bread, salad, and even some pie and Jell-O for dessert. A few people from different churches worked in the kitchen. They all smiled and were nice, but I wonder how happy they would be if they had to live here every day?

Of course, there's no such thing as a free meal. If we wanted food, we had to listen to a sermon from Pastor Sammy. I've heard a lot of sermons, but Pastor Sammy gives some good ones. He called this one, "Salvation City." Salvation City is a place where nobody can hurt anyone. No fear, no tears, lots of hope, and plenty of soap. That made everyone laugh. Pastor Sammy is good with rhymes like that—it helps us remember what he's trying to tell us.

Anyway, there's only one road to Salvation City and we're all pilgrims on that road. And thugs, like alcohol and drugs, lying, cheating, spying, and beatings want to give us a load and push us off the road. I remember those because of his rhymes again.

How does he do that? Pastor Sammy whips up the crowd when he gets going with his "halleluiahs" and "amens." Before long, we were shouting halleluiahs and amen right along with him.

Although it feels like we're walking that road alone, we're not. A host of angels guards the road, and all we have to do is ask for help when one of those thugs tries to push us away. And just like that, those angels will help set us free.

If only it were really that simple.

He called on a few people from the crowd to share their stories.

One man said he'd been a junkie for more than thirty years. He said that, two years ago, he sat at these same tables in this same dining hall and prayed for healing. He felt something reach inside his body and pull out all the temptation. It flew out right through his chest and disappeared into the air. The temptation was gone and he turned his life around. And now he has

a job, his family is back, and he's here tonight serving food, instead of consuming it. I liked his story, even though none of it applies to me.

After he finished, Pastor Sammy asked if anyone wanted to talk about what they were thankful for. The ex-junkie led off and said, "Freedom!" Several people laughed. A few said, "Amen." Some just nodded their heads. I wish I could be thankful for freedom.

Somebody said they were thankful for tonight's meal and the people who served it. I joined in the applause for that one. But since I'm supposed to write down my true feelings in this little book, the truth is, I don't feel thankful for anything. I appreciate the people who came out tonight and cooked for us, I really do, but I don't like my life and I don't belong here.

Another church group distributed coats. They gave me one, so now, I'll be able to sit outside with Orion without freezing. My new coat has two large pockets on the outside, which will help keep my hands warm, and one large pocket on the inside, that's just big enough to hold my diary. And it zips all the way to the top of my neck.

Maybe another group will hand out gloves. And hats. It would be nice to have gloves and a hat. And a scarf. I don't know where I would put it all, especially in the summer. But summer comes after winter, and right now, I need to stay warm for winter. Maybe by summer, I'll live in a nice apartment with places to put my things. I could have a table with a drawer, where I keep my diary. And my own bed, with sheets, blanket, and bedspread. And curtains. Peach colored curtains with lace edges.

I like this diary idea. I think I'll keep sitting outside with Orion and writing a little longer. Maybe tonight, I'll figure out what to do about the thugs in my way on the road to Salvation City.

I'm not an alcoholic or a junkie. I know all addicts say that, and everyone says they can quit anytime they want, when the truth is, they really can't quit. But I'm different. And I know everyone says they're different, when, really, they're all the same. But I really am different—I don't touch alcohol or drugs. Or cigarettes. And I never will.

I see things. And feel things. Sometimes I see lines and shapes on the walls. Lines start at the bottom and then twist and turn and multiply, and before long, the wall is filled with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of complex shapes. Sometimes the shapes form on roads, or in grass, or on snowbanks, or even in thin air. And sometimes, these shapes turn into tunnels, beckoning me

in. But they aren't real. I know they're not real, but they feel real, and I need to find out what's inside. I try to get inside them, but I never can.

I get upset when I can't cross the threshold, and the more upset I become, the stronger those shapes beckon for me to come inside, which makes me even more upset. The scenes always end up the same way, with me screaming and crying hysterically, gasping for air until I find my way back to the here and now.

And that's why I can't hold a job, or drive a car, or do many of the things everyone else takes for granted. And the real reason why every friend I've ever had is gone. They all got tired of helplessly watching a raving lunatic with an insatiable desire to climb inside imaginary shapes and disappear into her own private world.

#####

As I stare out at the southern sky, I see Pastor Sammy out of the corner of my eye. His rhymes are contagious. That makes me smile. He ambles over and sits down next to me.

"Nice night," he says. "What's out there?"

"Orion. Right up there." I point to the three stars in a row. "He's the most dependable friend I have."

Sammy studies me for a few seconds. "What brought you here?"

I laugh. "The bus. This is as good a place as any to be."

"No, sorry, I asked that wrong. What I mean is, why are you here at all?"

No one has ever asked me that. Ever. I don't know how to answer. I can't help it. I tear up. "I'm a failure. This is where failures end up."

I focus on Orion and the constellations. I don't want the shapes to show up. Not tonight.

"You don't look like a failure to me."

"I'd rather not talk about it," is all I can manage. But I really do want to talk about it. It's just that I can't. Most people don't believe me, and the ones who do believe me never come back.

"That's fine. I'm sorry for prying. But I do have some good news. Is it okay if I share it with you?"

Great, somebody else's good news. Again. I'm overjoyed for your happiness. But maybe he'll leave me alone if I let him gloat. "Sure, why not. I'm happy for you."

"It's not good news for me, it's good news for all of us."

"What?" I ask.

"Well, it's just that you said that constellation is the best friend you have. God wants me to tell you, that's not true."

I laugh. "God told you that, did he?"

"He sure did. He talks to me. He told me to come outside and sit down with you for a few minutes. He said maybe you want to talk about some things."

This is getting weird. "Um, do you hear voices in your head?"

Now it's Sammy's turn to laugh. And he gets a conspiratorial look in his eye. He leans in close, and very quietly says, "Sometimes." Then he leans back. "Sometimes I think I hear angels cheering when somebody accepts Jesus. And one time, when I was trying to be a smartass to God, a voice in my head said, 'you're not ready yet.' That time, the voice was just like you and I talking right now. Except I was alone. But mostly, like tonight, it's just a feeling. I've learned to trust it."

"Well, doc, you hear voices, I see things. Maybe we're both crazy."

"What things do you see?"

"I see shapes that turn into tunnels leading to different places. But I can never get inside the tunnels to find out where they go. And that drives me crazy."

"What kind of shapes?"

"Usually circles, triangles, and ovals. Sometimes the outlines draw themselves and then they fill in with black. Sometimes the black changes to a glitter pattern and the sparkles twirl around and around each other. The shapes move and merge with other shapes, and then split off into new shapes. And they all want me to come inside and explore."

"How do you know they want you to come inside?"

"I just know. It's not like I hear voices in my head or anything, I just know."

"Do you see the rest of the world when you see the shapes?"

I need to think about that one. "Yeah. The real world is still there. And I know the shapes aren't real, but they want me to crawl inside anyway. And the shapes get bigger and bigger and stronger and stronger. I can't resist them, but I also can't get inside them. Sometimes, they get

right up into my face, almost touching my nose. I want to reach inside, to see what's there, but I'm afraid whatever is inside will pull me in and I'll never get back out."

We sit in silence for a few minutes. And then I ask, "So, that's the good news God told you to tell me—Orion's not my best friend? That's it? You know, it's not like I think those stars have any supernatural powers or anything. I might be crazy, but I'm not nuts."

Sammy smiles. He leans back, closes his eyes, and tilts his chin ever-so-slightly up. As if he's inhaling something. Then he turns to face me, with a deadly serious look on his face. "Orion will always be there, that's true. But, so will God. And you don't need to climb into a rocket and fly anywhere to meet God. He's right here, sitting next to us. If you want to talk to Him, all you have to do is ask. Orion isn't your best friend. God is, if you want Him to be."

I start to cry. Again. He can't possibly know what God and I have been through. How my dad told me before he died that God is for weak-minded people who need a crutch, or how my mom still doesn't believe me when I try to tell her about the shapes, or about what these shapes have done to people I love.

Why didn't God stop me any of the times I wore my fingers raw trying to dig tunnels in my mom's front yard with my bare hands in front of all the neighbors? Where was God when I nearly bashed my head in, trying to climb inside a circle that showed up on the side of a building in downtown Minneapolis? Or the time I jumped out of a car and ran down the Riverside Avenue ramp onto Interstate 94 chasing a shape in the center median? Fifteen cars piled into each other that day to avoid hitting me. They all missed me. All but one car also missed my brother, but one was enough. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time, trying to catch me and lead me away from danger. He died, trying to take care of me. The rest of my family didn't want me at his funeral.

What would I even say to God, anyway? Maybe, hey, thanks God for letting my brother die instead of me? God, if you want to be my friend, if you want me to trust you instead of a constellation in the sky, then bring my brother back. We all know that's not going to happen. But here's something you might be willing to do. Get rid of these shapes. I can't even face my own mother for fear of them coming back at the wrong time.

Sammy interrupts my thoughts. "It's called Schizophrenia."

"Huh?"

"I'll bet that's what you have. It's called Schizophrenia."



“How do you know?”

“You can look it up on the Internet. Schizophrenia is when people see things that aren’t really there. It’s just like any other disease that attacks part of your body. But Schizophrenia attacks your brain.”

“It’s nice to know that what I have has a name. Does God have a cure?”

“I don’t know if there’s a cure, but mental health specialists can help you manage it.”

“Like the shrinks I saw in high school? No thanks.”

“And that’s why you’re here?”

“Yep. That’s why I’m here. Because none of those shrinks could figure out how to fix me.”

“How many psychologists did you see?”

“I don’t know. A few counsellors at school. What’s the difference? They’re all shrinks.”

We sat in silence for another few minutes.

“Some herbal teas that might help. I’ve heard that Green Cardamom tea and Chamomile do some good. Grind up the seeds and mix a spoonful of powder with a cup of boiling water. Let it sit for a few minutes and then drink it twice a day. Prayer is also good.”

I laugh. “Okay, I’ll take a prayer. Nothing to lose.”

Sammy looks at me and smiles. He takes my hand. “Father, help our sister, Citrus, come to know you in ways none of us can imagine. And heal her. Make these shapes go away and never return. Give her an awareness of your presence that knocks all of our socks off, and give her a desire to do Your will. In Jesus’s name, amen.”

I tear up again. “Thanks Sammy. And I’ll try that tea.”

He pats me on the back, then gets up and walks off, leaving me to my thoughts.

Friday, Nov.29, 2013

Pastor Sammy and I had a great talk last night. I like him. I think I'll try that herbal tea idea he gave me. After all these years, I finally have some hope. But I can't do it today. It's Black Friday and all the stores are too crowded. Crowds stress me out and I don't need another meltdown.

But even if I could deal with the crowds and stress, my cash card is empty. It's the end of the month and the \$203 monthly benefit from Ramsey County is gone. So, Monday, after the first of the month when city busses are on their weekday schedule, is the soonest I can buy herbal tea. I'll have to sacrifice something in December to make up for it. But that's a problem for late December. I have to live through early December first. It will be worth it if I can make these shapes go away. Then maybe I can find a job and January will be better. I'll use the weekend to find a cup and a way to heat up water. I'll need a stirring spoon, too. Can't forget that.

I miss Mark. I want to get better for him. Maybe I'll have more to be thankful for next Thanksgiving.

Sunday, Dec, 1, 2013

Maddening! How can I not find a teacup? Does everyone have this problem? The shelter has a kitchen, and the kitchen has plates, cups, and silverware. But I can't just boil tea and pour it in a cup. That's against the rules. Which I understand, because if everyone grabbed a teacup anytime they wanted, the kitchen would not have any teacups left.

What about using paper cups? The shelter has plenty of those, but I need something sturdier to boil and strain the tea.

I ended up improvising. I spoke to the shelter director and gained permission to wash a few empty pickle jars and vegetable cans. I'll pour water into a pickle jar, boil it in the microwave, and then pour it over Green Cardamom powder in a vegetable can. Then I'll strain it through a paper towel into a paper cup and drink it.

I haven't figured out how to grind the seeds yet.

The shelter has a couple of old computers connected to the Internet and I looked up Schizophrenia. That does sound like what I have. And I read that some people have it much worse. If I can look it up on the Internet, I don't know why none of those counsellors back in high school could figure it out.

I also looked up where I can buy Green Cardamom. The closest is a Bullseye Store about five miles east of the shelter, on White Bear Avenue. Bus number sixty-three does the trip every twenty minutes on weekdays. So, once my card has some money, I can use it to buy a bus ticket at the station. I'll get an express pass for \$2.25 which will be good for two and one half hours. That should be plenty of time for a round trip to the store.

I spent most of Saturday figuring out logistics and learning how to pour boiling water from one can through a paper towel into another can. It was frustrating, but I was proud of myself after figuring it all out. I talked to Pastor Sammy today after church service, and he seemed proud too. This isn't in the Bible, but Sammy says, "The Lord helps those who also help themselves."

#####

Maybe Sammy is onto something. I need to write this down. The shelter gets a few copies of the St. Paul Pioneer Press and I'm looking at today's ads. I like to look in the Sunday paper and dream about living in an apartment with a living room and bedroom. And owning my own refrigerator and stove and big screen TV.

Here's an ad for Bullseye Stores and get this—they're demonstrating how to spice up your cooking, and one of the spices is Green Cardamom. Today is the first of the month, so my card should have money. I'm going over there right now. Even with busses on the weekend schedule.

#####

I am so glad I visited Bullseye today! I know the lady demonstrating the spices was there to sell products and not answer a million questions, but I watched her demonstration three times and still had questions, so I worked up the courage to walk up and ask her. Should I buy Green Cardamom powder, or seeds and grind up the seeds myself? If I buy seeds, how do I grind them up? How long does it last? And, of course, does Green Cardamom really help with what I've got, Schizophrenia?

She was even younger than me, and I was afraid she would ignore my questions, or at best, give me half-hearted answers. But we connected. She told me she was a psychology major at the U of M, and that's what persuaded me to tell her about my problem. She said she would talk it over with some professors this week and would be back in the store next Sunday demonstrating something else.

And now I know how to make Green Cardamom tea. And the best part is, she brought me to the store manager, who offered to let me try a sample for a few days. If it helps, then I can stock up. Seeds last longer than powder and I can tell how fresh they are by smell. I watched them grind up one ounce of seeds into a powder and put it in a sealed bag. At one teaspoon per day, that should last three days. I can't wait to make my first cup!

I also splurged today and bought a hairbrush. I'd planned to spend money on the Cardamom anyway, and now I'll be able to brush my hair and look nice for my job interviews. After my trip today, I should have about \$197 left on my cash card.

I'll keep that brush in my purse. I call it my purse, but it's more like a bag. I'm looking at it right now. It's an old, dirty, cloth bag and I don't even remember where I found it. I think it used to be white, but now it's mostly grey. The edges are frayed and I keep fixing the ripped seams with duct tape that the shelter lets me use. I should also put duct tape around the edges to keep them from fraying any more.

I'm going to use that tea to get better, and then I'm going to get a job and move into my own apartment. And maybe I'll buy a real purse.

Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2013

I made my first batch of tea Sunday night, two batches on Monday, and one more yesterday morning before running out. I hoped to get six batches, but I must have used a little more than a teaspoon in each batch, or maybe the store gave me less than an ounce. It's too soon to tell if the tea makes a difference, but, so far, so good. And now, I'm on bus sixty-three to Bullseye this morning to get some more Green Cardamom.

#####

We're driving east on Third Street. Harding High School is on my left. It's a nice neighborhood with well-kept houses and shoveled driveways. It's grey outside and snowing. Just a light snow, not anything we can't handle. This is Minnesota, after all.

We stop at the Hazelwood Street bus stop. The Harding High School sign is red, with a black triangle under the word, Harding.

But now it's not a triangle.

It's an oval. I can look inside—it goes on infinitely.

There are people inside who can help me.

They're calling.

“NO!”

The man in the seat in front of me jumps and looks back at me.

“Sorry,” I say. “I didn't mean to yell.”

The Harding High School sign looks normal.

But now a circle is forming in the isle near my seat. It's growing. It's going to swallow me. It's getting closer. Why doesn't anyone else see it? I close my eyes. I can't escape. When I open my eyes again, it's gone. Just a dreary day in a city bus.

The next stop is Flandrau Street, one block away from White Bear Ave., where we'll turn right to cross over I-94 and enter the Bullseye parking lot. St. Pascal Baylon School is across the street from this stop, and I see shapes forming in the parking lot. That school is full of elementary school kids and only I can see what's forming. I have to warn them! I rush off the bus

before the doors close. I can warn the school and then catch the next bus to Bullseye. It's a good plan. I know what I'm doing.

I rush across Flandrau Street into the school parking lot. The asphalt is normally dark grey, but the snow makes everything white. A giant circle is growing, coming toward me, almost at my feet. Then it disappears.

No, it doesn't disappear. It's moving through the parking lot. No longer inviting me in, it dares me to follow, to try to stop it. I chase after it. It needs to stop. It's bad enough that it ensnares me; I can't let it capture anyone else.

Now it's an oval on the building. It's trying to get in the closed windows. I have to stop it. And I have to see what's inside. I have to save everyone inside that building! I lunge with every ounce of strength in my body.

Glass crashes. I'm on my back. Faces stare down at me. Dozens of young faces.

"The shapes!" I shout. "Don't let the shapes in!"

Glass is everywhere. And blood. I'm bleeding from my head. It's cold and warm at the same time. Cold air, coming in through an open window. Who leaves an open window when it's snowing outside? But the window is broken. How did that happen? Why am I lying in a sea of broken glass and blood? Why are there desks all around me?

Then I know. I'm in a classroom full of scared children. And they're scared of me. I pull my knees up to my chin and close my eyes. This is all a dream.

#####

I had the worst nightmare. I dreamed about faces. They were all staring down at me. Children's faces. They were afraid. Afraid of me. Why?

My head feels tender. I feel stitches. My face is scratched.

Oh, no, please, no, tell me it was all a nightmare. Maybe I'm still dreaming and I can wake up from all this.

But I'm not dreaming.

Police are here. More are on the way. Sirens, uniforms, voices. Somebody asking me questions. They sound like they're in a tunnel.

Wait—that happened in the past, not right now. Memories flood my head. Somebody helped me up. We walked down a hallway and got in the back of a car. But it wasn't a car, it was an ambulance. I tried to tell them about the shapes. The shapes that wanted to swallow up the building and the children inside. I had to go back! I had to save them! People held me down. Somebody said everything would be all right. I'd done my part.

Why is my inner thigh sore? It was a needle. Somebody stabbed me with a needle. They injected me with something. I could feel it. It put me to sleep and now I'm here.

Where is here? What about the school? What happened to the children? Are they okay? Why did I need to save them? It was the shapes! But no, the shapes have always been for me, not anyone else. Why did the shapes want to harm the children this time?

I look around. I'm in a bed with bars on either side. I see monitors mounted on the wall all around me. I'm in a hospital room. Something is attached to my right index finger. It's an alligator clip with a wire running to one of the monitors. I take it off and the beep beep beep turns into an annoying beeeeeeeep that won't stop.

A few seconds later, two nurses and a police officer rush in. But when they see me, awake and holding this clip, they look relieved. And annoyed.

“Where am I?” I ask.

“You're in St. Paul Regions Hospital.”

“How'd I get here?”

“An ambulance brought you in this morning. You were pretty banged up. They said you fell through a plate-glass window.”

I pause for a few seconds, gathering my thoughts. Somebody turned off the annoying monitor.

“So, it's true. I saw the shapes again.” I start to cry, softly. “Are all the kids okay?”

“They're fine. But you gave everyone quite a scare. What shapes?”

“Black circles and ovals and triangles. They wanted to swallow the building. I had to stop them.”

They're studying me. One nurse is young, probably fresh out of college. Not much older than me. The other looks more seasoned. The police officer is intimidating with his uniform and all the devices on his belt.



“I was on my way to Bullseye to get some more Green Cardamom seeds to make tea. It’s supposed to help. But I saw the shapes from the bus and I had to stop them from swallowing that school. I know the shapes aren’t real. I know it now. But when I see them, something happens and the world for me is different. Please. Help me!”

The police officer and older nurse exchange glances. “Do you have suicidal thoughts?” asks the older nurse.

“Huh? No. I don’t want to kill myself!”

“Do you have a desire to harm others?”

“No! Why are you asking me these questions?”

“We have to.”

Now I’m sobbing. I can’t help it. I just want this to go away. “But when the shapes come, everything changes. I never want to hurt anyone, but the shapes did this time and I had to protect everyone. And nobody can see the shapes but me!”

The older nurse nods. “We’re waiting for a bed in the mental health unit. We expect one to open up today. A mental health professional will be coming to interview you soon.”

All I can say is, “Thank you.”

#####

It’s late afternoon. I must have fallen asleep. I see somebody in the door looking at me. A different nurse?

She sees me open my eyes. “Hi, um, Citrus Greene?”

“Just Cit. How long have I been here?”

‘I don’t know what time you came in. It’s about 4 O’clock right now. Want to tell me what’s going on?’

“Well, I’m hungry. And my head is sore. Who are you?”

“Juliana,” is all she says. I notice she’s dressed in blue jeans and a sweatshirt underneath her white lab coat. Dark skin, glasses. I can’t tell how old she is. She’s pretty. She probably has a husband or a boyfriend. She acts like she’s in charge. She extends her arm and we shake hands.

“Cit, I want you to know, we’re going to get at the bottom of what’s going on with you. I’ve read the reports, and now I want to hear from you.”

“Are you a shrink?”

“I’m a psychiatrist. My job is meds. Well, generally. That’s what psychiatrists do, we prescribe meds. But as the department head, I can poke my nose into pretty much anything. You’ll spend more time with a psychologist who can help you learn some coping skills.”

She pauses and expects me to say something.

“Okay,” is all I can come up with.

“Tell me about these shapes. You said earlier they’re black triangles, ovals, and circles. And somehow, they influence you. This morning, you jumped through a window and scared a whole school full of kids. Next time, it could be worse. Can you tell me if there’s anything common about when they show up? Or when they started?”

“They started when I was sixteen. I was in tenth grade and nobody else could see them. And nobody believed me. They went away for a while, but then came back, and now I see them all the time. I don’t know what makes them come back. My friend, Sammy, told me a few days ago, he thinks I have Schizophrenia and my brain makes these shapes.”

“Your friend, Sammy, is probably right. We suspect the same thing. And we have meds that might be able to control it.”

“You mean, I can take a pill and all of it goes away?”

“It’s not that simple. Different meds work differently for different people and they all have different side effects. We have to figure out what works for you. And we need to teach you some coping skills.”

“Coping skills? What kind of skills?”

“Identifying your triggers for one. Something triggers your hallucinations and if we can identify it, then we can teach you to manage it.”

“But I don’t know what triggers them.”

Juliana smiles. She looks nice when she smiles, like she enjoys her job. She makes me want to trust her. She’s a shrink, but maybe she’s different than the ones from high school.

“You know, just about every patient says that. And sometimes, the hallucinations really are random, at least from what we currently know how to measure. Sometimes, a certain thought or memory, or maybe weather, or maybe lighting, or any number of factors, can be a contributor. Diet is also a possibility. Your care team will need you to put on your scientist hat and think back on all your episodes. Look for anything in common.”

“I’ll try.” I really will. She actually believes me.

“Tell me about your life. Where do you work?”

I have to think about this one. I don’t have any money and the wrong answer could be bad. “I, um, I help out at the Ruth Family Center.” This is technically true. I do help as much as I can.

“Where do you live?”

How do I answer that? “Where I work. It, um, keeps the commute short.”

Juliana nods and smiles. “There, see? That’s a coping skill. You looked for a way to provide truthful answers, without coming right out and saying you live in a homeless shelter. If we can teach you coping skills to deal with your hallucinations, maybe you won’t need that shelter any longer.”

She got me. Now what? “The only money I have is in my cash card, in my purse.”

She laughs. “That’s okay. Don’t worry about money. We have several pools to draw from. And if you need to sign up for M.A., we can help with that.”

“M.A.?”

“Medical Assistance. It’s a state sponsored insurance program. So, don’t worry about where you live or paying for your care here. We have specialists that can help take care of that.”

I’m starting to feel good about this place.

“Tell me about what happened after that first episode in, was it the tenth grade?”

“I pretty much freaked out in front of the whole school in the main hallway. I saw the shapes on the walls and they called me. I tried to jump inside, but they always moved. I yelled for them to stay still for a few seconds, since they were calling me. But they wouldn’t stay still.

“The whole school watched me jump into walls and run down the hallway, screaming at walls and lockers. A teacher tackled me and brought me to the nurse’s office. They called my mom and she picked me up and brought me home. She was mad because she had to take off from work.”

“Any history of substance abuse?”

“NO! I don’t use drugs. Why does everyone keep asking me that?”

“Because drugs can trigger hallucinations like the ones you describe,” says Juliana. “If we’re going to fix you, we need to figure out what’s wrong first. Would it be okay if we take a blood sample?”

“Every hospital I’ve been in wants a blood sample. Don’t you guys talk to each other?”

Juliana laughs. “Privacy laws sometimes make it difficult. Can you tell me with one hundred percent certainty that we won’t find any drugs or alcohol or nicotine in your system?”

“Yes.”

“Good. So, what happened after that episode?”

“I went back to school the next day. But it was different. Nobody wanted to talk to me. Even the teachers acted weird. And then, later, I saw the shapes again. And again. And, after a while, I just stopped going back. My mom told me that if I wasn’t willing to go to school, that I could leave. So, I left. And I’ve been on my own since then.”

“Any brothers or sisters?”

Now I start to cry again. “I had a brother, Mark, but he died.”

I don’t want to tell her how he died.

“Did he have any mental issues?”

“Only one. He tried to look after me.”

Friday, Dec. 6, 2013

The hospital could only hold me for three days. It's the law. So, tonight, I'm checked out. Right this minute, I'm sitting in the lobby catching up with my journal. It was a good three days. The nurses and doctors are part detective, part coach, part teacher, all caring, and all amazing. And I have a new life goal—I want to become a psychologist and help teenagers so nobody has to go through what I've gone through.

And—this is also amazing—we pieced together the dates of all my episodes and figured out, they all came around the same time during my monthly cycle. They said there's some research on this and no conclusions that it effects everyone this way, but at least that's what seems to happen with me. There are drugs that can help, and I've already filled the prescriptions. For free, thanks to that state M.A. program. I have them right here in my purse.

We found a GED program and I'm going to sign up and finish my diploma. And then I'm going to college, where I'll major in psychology. For the first time, ever, I can't wait to meet the future.

I'm going to visit my mom tonight. I haven't talked to her since before Mark's funeral. Maybe when I tell her I have Schizophrenia, and it's a real condition that attacks my brain, maybe she'll believe me. It would be nice to live at home for a while to get back on my feet. Not that anything is wrong with the Center. I just want to be with my own family.

#####

The meeting with mom did not go well. I am sitting at the bus stop, trying to write. It's below zero and I'm shivering and my tears keep dripping on the paper in my journal. I need a scarf. And a hat. And mittens. I hope the Center has beds tonight. I don't know where I'll sleep if not. More later.

Saturday, Dec. 7, 2013

It's 8 am and eleven below zero outside. I would be dead if the Center hadn't taken me back last night. How could I go from so happy to so sad?

Last night, after the hospital discharged me, I took the bus from the hospital to mom's house. Something was wrong with my cash card because the machine wouldn't let me buy a bus ticket. But the bus driver let me on anyway because it was so cold outside. And another bus driver let me ride his bus to the Center.

Mom would not even let me in the house. I rang the doorbell and she answered. But when she saw it was me, she said I killed Mark and she closed the door in my face. I stood on the front porch for a while, trying to figure out what to do next. I hadn't thought about where I would go if mom turned me away.

But mom was right. Even though I wasn't driving the car that killed Mark, it was my fault that Mark died. If he hadn't tried to rescue me, he would be alive now and I'd be dead.

All I do is cause pain. I'm crying again and my tears keep smearing the ink.

I have to call Uncle Sam Bank about this cash card.

#####

The bank looked up my card balance. It's less than one dollar, and when they looked up recent transactions, none of it made sense. They showed the hairbrush I bought at Bullseye on Sunday. But then somebody ninety miles away in St. Cloud bought a computer game console with my card, and that's why my card has nothing left. But how could that happen? I've never been to St. Cloud, my card hasn't left my purse, and my purse was locked up at the hospital. So how did somebody in St. Cloud use my cash card to buy a game console?

The bank is sending me a new card here to the Center, but the money is gone. The money I need for the rest of the month. The money I needed for mittens and a hat and a scarf. And bus tickets to job interviews. All gone. What am I going to do?

#####

I've been sitting here, thinking about how Mark would be alive if not for me. And those kids in the school—I could have hurt one of them. What happens if the drugs from the hospital don't work and I see the shapes again? And now I don't even have a good cash card. I am alone in the world. Everything I do makes the world worse.

The Center is seven blocks away from the Robert Street Bridge. The bridge has a knee-high wall, and on a day like today, the Mississippi River below will be very cold. It probably won't be frozen, at least not in the middle, because it's a river and the water is moving. I've heard that when you hit freezing cold water, it only takes a few seconds for all feeling to go out of your body.

#####

I've thought about it before. Maybe, if I were to drown in an icy river, the world would be better off. Who would I give my new coat to? I could just take it off on the sidewalk and leave it. Somebody would take it. Maybe they'll have a hat and a scarf and mittens, but need a new coat. So, the coat could do somebody else some good.

I'll set my purse on top of it so the wind doesn't blow it into the traffic. It's not even a real purse. It's just a stupid, worn out bag. Just like me. It's worthless.

Jesse Jonsen, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2013

I like to give back. No, that's wrong. I need to give back. I also like it, but I do it because I need to, not because I like it. That probably doesn't make any rational sense, especially with the bankers I work with today, but it's true. I guess you could say, I like turning lemons into lemonade.

It goes back to when I was a teenager. I told my parents I had a job at Dairy Queen, and that's how I made enough money to buy nice clothes, CDs, jewelry, you name it. That's right, CDs. It was the 90s. I was a Hanson fan. Jesse Jonsen, well-dressed Hanson fan. Anyone who knows me today would never believe it. Especially the clothes. I usually stick to bluejeans and my red turtleneck these days. I don't think I even own a dress.

I lied to my parents. I never had a job at Dairy Queen. Are you kidding? Making ice-cream all day? That still gives me the shivers. Especially on a below zero day like today. No, I was criminal. I stole all those nice clothes, CDs, jewelry, and you name it. I had all kinds of clever ways to lift anything I wanted, anytime I wanted. I did it for the thrill. I did it to outsmart all the security guards and antitheft measures the stores put in place to stop thieves like me.

And I was good at it. I outsmarted them all. Until I got caught. And spent a year at the Itasca County School Girls Group home, 200 miles from home and everything I knew, where a lot of people poured a lot of time and effort into helping me. Now that I'm an adult, words can't describe how grateful I am, although I tried once. I still have two yellowed copies of a high school class writing assignment where I described what I used to be and what I wanted to become. I re-read it every Thanksgiving, to this very day, almost eighteen years later.

I decided to make a career out of outsmarting criminals like my younger self, who think they can outsmart people like me today. But I have the advantage because I know how they think. Which makes me a great fraud analyst with Uncle Sam Bank in Minneapolis.

But it doesn't explain why I was on my way into the Ruth Family Center in downtown St. Paul this cold Saturday morning to serve food and help out. I do it occasionally, usually a week or so after a holiday when all the holiday helpers are gone. I do it because it reminds me of where I could have been without help. I don't have a way to give back to the people who helped me, but maybe I can pay it forward to others who need help today. That's why I do it. And sometimes, they really do ask me to make jugs of lemonade and serve it.



As I write this, it's Saturday night and I'm home now, safe in my apartment. It's been an emotional day. Maybe gut-wrenching is better.

I never made it to the Center this morning. We had a fraud issue at a branch in south Minneapolis yesterday. A customer had a problem with an ATM card, and we found out her checking account had been emptied. We'll investigate and put things right, but I heard her story and wanted to meet with her this morning. I could have worked it all from the office on Monday, but I had a feeling I needed to meet with her in person.

Which explains why I was crossing the Robert Street Bridge on the way to the Center this morning, instead of coming in from my usual direction on I-94. It's amazing how small decisions can turn into life changing events.

As I drove onto the bridge headed north, I noticed a girl walking on the sidewalk towards me. She stopped half-way across the bridge, dropped her coat, carefully placed a worn bag she was holding on top of the coat, and then turned toward the three-foot-high wall to stare down at the icy Mississippi River below.

This girl was about to jump off that bridge to her death!

I stopped my car, right there in traffic, causing a big traffic jam on the bridge, and jumped out of my car to ask her what was wrong. Because nothing good could explain why this girl was out in her short sleeves in below zero weather, staring at an icy river from on top of a bridge.

"Hey—what's your name? Aren't you cold out here?"

"Sit."

"Huh?"

"Sit."

I sat down. Right there on the cold sidewalk. Maybe it would calm her. She smiled. That was a good sign.

"No, not 'sit.' My name is Citrus. People call me 'Cit.'"

I stood up. My butt was freezing. I like to take my coat off in the car and it was in the back seat.

"Citrus is a pretty name. My name's Jesse. How about we sit in my car, where it's warm?"

"I'm afraid. I hurt people. You don't want to be near me."

She was crying. Her tears froze on her eyelashes, framing her eyes in white frost and making her eyes sparkle in the cold, morning sunlight.

“Cit, I’m freezing, you’re freezing, and we’re both shivering. Let’s sit in my car and I’ll turn the heat on full blast. How about it?”

I put my arm around her, which wasn’t easy—I’m only about five feet, one inch, and she was a good six inches taller than me—and guided into the passenger seat of my car. I picked up her coat and bag and walked around to my side. And we drove off.

I wasn’t sure what to do, so I headed toward Regions Hospital, only a few blocks up Robert Street, and then a right turn onto 14th. I figured they’d have professionals who knew how to deal with people who stood on bridges staring at an icy Mississippi River in below zero weather.

“Cit, why were you standing on that bridge in your short sleeves?”

She stared at me with a blank face. And then she sent chills down my spine. “I killed my brother.”

I swallowed hard and tried to focus on getting to the hospital, alive.

“Um, how did you kill your brother?” I couldn’t help myself.

“I didn’t kill him. It was the shapes! He tried to stop me from chasing the shapes.”

“What shapes?”

“The shapes that I see.”

“And you killed him for that?”

“No.”

She folded her arms in front of her stomach, bowed her head, and closed her eyes, as if she was in pain.

“Are you hurt?”

“Yes,” she whimpered.

“Where?” Like I could do anything about it. I’m a fraud analyst, not a doctor.

“Everywhere.”

“Did somebody hit you? Or did you hurt yourself?”

“No. Nobody hit me.” She looked at me and tears welled up in her eyes. “I don’t mean to scare people.”

“But you said you killed your brother.” I just can’t leave well enough alone.

“I didn’t kill him. But it’s my fault he’s dead.”

“Was it an accident?”

“Yes.”

“What happened?”

“He followed me out onto the Interstate, trying to save me from the shapes. He died in a car accident. I lived.”

I hadn’t realized I’d been holding my breath. I slowly exhaled. This girl had problems, but she wasn’t a murderer.

“My mom hates me. I don’t know what I’ll do if the shapes come back again. And somebody stole all the money from my cash card. I can’t even buy a bus ticket!”

As a fraud analyst, I was probably curious about the wrong thing. “What happened to your cash card?”

“What?”

“Um, your cash card. What happened to it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you lose it?”

“No, it’s right here.” She fumbled in her bag and showed it to me. Wouldn’t you know, it, Uncle Sam Bank is the issuer.

“Did you loan it to anyone?”

“No.”

By then, we were in the hospital parking lot.

I drove into the ramp, parked the car, and we walked into the ER together. We waited in the lobby for six hours, watching an overburdened staff try to offer comfort to an endless stream of humanity with unsolvable problems.

While we waited, Cit told me about how she saw these shapes in her mind, how they call to her, how her brother died, how her mother blamed her, and how she had just been discharged from this same hospital yesterday after they told her she had Schizophrenia.

Hello? They tell her she has Schizophrenia and then put her right back out on the street? I asked about that later. It’s the law. Mental health hospitals can only keep people for three days without lots of legal work.

She first got it when she was in tenth grade, or one year younger than I was when I decided not to be a criminal anymore.

And now she's homeless. She lives at Ruth Family Center because she has nowhere else to go. Imagine getting, say, pneumonia, or cancer, and being discriminated against because of an illness. That's what she endured since she was sixteen and her mom kicked her out of the house. The more she told me, the more my heart broke.

"So, why were you on that bridge?"

"I went to see my mom last night. I was so excited. I wanted to tell her I knew what was wrong with me and how we had a plan to fix it. But she wouldn't even let me in the house. And then my cash card was no good and the only reason I even got a ride back to the Center was a kind bus driver let me ride for free. That card was the last straw. It was like the world was telling me it would be better off with me gone."

Then she looked me right in the eye. "I was about to jump off that bridge when you showed up. A few seconds later and I would have been dead. Jesse, I don't want to die!"

I lost it. She lost it. We hugged each other and smeared tears and mascara everywhere.

After waiting six hours in the lobby, that's when a nurse came out and called for her. Right in the middle of our hugfest.

I walked back into the exam room with her, and we told the nurse how we'd gotten to this point. This was when I realized, I didn't even know Cit's full name. Until she wrote it on the admission form. Citrus Greene. Has a nice ring to it. And that's when I decided I wanted to help her turn this lemon she'd been given into lemonade.

That's what I do. I turn lemons into lemonade. I'm known for it.

"We never introduced ourselves. I'm Jesse. Jesse Jonsen."

"I'm Citrus Greene. Nice to meet you. Officially." She smiled.

"Is it okay if I take a picture of your card with your card number?" I asked.

"Why?"

"Well, I work at Uncle Sam Bank. Maybe I can look it up and see what's going on."

#####

That was about four hours ago. I left after they checked Cit back into the mental health unit at the hospital. She's in good hands for the next three days. I know I didn't help out at the Ruth Family Center today, but maybe I helped somewhere more important. I'll visit Cit in a couple days. And I will follow up on her credit card. Which reminds me, I forgot to get her social security number. I'll have to call her anyway.

Monday, Dec. 9, 2013

What a day at work. A big part of the job of a fraud analyst is to watch what goes on in the criminal underworld. Thanks to the Internet, today's crooks have a whole global, underground economy, complete with venture capitalists, supply chains, customer support, banking services, you name it. My alter-ego, Teena Fay from Green Bay, regularly interacts with this gang. Teena has a public Gmail account for email, and her spelling and grammar are atrocious. She fits right in, bantering and negotiating with underground crime bosses who think she's a small-time, wannabe crook in Wisconsin. But she's really a short, dark haired fraud analyst who wants to nail their hides to the wall.

Anyway, somebody put fifteen million credit card numbers up for sale over the weekend on one of the underground websites I monitor. One million of those are ours. How do I know? Because the first six digits of every credit card number are the Bank Information Number (BIN), and the guy who put these cards up for sale also provided a list of BINs with counts for each. The counts for all our BINs added up to around one million. With an average credit limit of two thousand dollars, that means my bank is on the hook for up to \$2 billion in liability. And climbing.

So, yeah, it's a big deal.

We needed to figure out how this guy got his hands on all those credit cards, so Teena bought one hundred of them with BINs that came from our bank. I know that means we put money into a criminal's hands, but that was the only way we could get the sample we needed. Our IT wizards have programs that do bulk searches, looking for merchants in common with a group of credit cards. Once we had the credit card numbers, we walked back the transactions and found one merchant in common with all of them—Bullseye Stores.

That's right. The huge retailer that has its headquarters in the same Minneapolis skyway system as our headquarters. The company where I used to work until they outsourced my job and I left. That same one. Poetic justice. Except, it's not. Real people are getting ripped off on a breathtaking scale. And I'm going to nail the guy who's doing it. He calls himself "Tarman" on his website. I suspect he's in Russia. I don't know who this guy is, but I'm going to teach him he messed with the wrong bank.

Which reminds me, I need to call Cit and get her social security number, so I can look up what's going on with her card. I could have included her number in the bulk search with the batch I bought today, but that's questionable ethics. I'll run hers individually.

Tuesday, Dec. 10 2013

I visited Cit in the hospital today. She's been there for the three days the law allows and they were getting ready to discharge her. I gave her a ride back to the Ruth Family Center. I met Pastor Sammy, and we're all going to take good care of her.

I found out what happened with her cash card. She bought a hairbrush at Bullseye Stores on Sunday, Dec. 1. A hairbrush! Somehow, Tarman stole her credit card number from Bullseye and it ended up on Tarman's website. A crook here in the US bought the card number, printed new plastic, and sold it to another crook in St. Cloud, who promptly emptied it of all its value.

That chain of crooks delivered the final blow, driving Cit to that bridge after an overburdened mental health system failed her. If I hadn't shown up at that exact time, she would be dead. It sends chills up my spine thinking about it. And makes me want to cry. But mostly, it makes me mad.

Cit was overjoyed when I told her I pulled some strings to recharge her card. It wasn't a tough sell. People who work in big banks are still human beings, and Uncle Sam Bank can afford the two hundred bucks if we do it quietly.

I'll tell you one thing. I might not be able to fix our mental health system, but I'm going to get that Russian SOB, Tarman. I brought in an IT contractor, Jerry Barkley, to help, and I have a meeting with my boss, Harlan Swenson early tomorrow morning to go over my plan. I'm going to teach Tarman that he messed with the wrong fraud analyst at the wrong bank.

I'm also going to find the SOB in St. Cloud who drained Cit's cash card, and after I break his legs, he's going to reimburse the bank. Then, I'll find out who sold him that fake card and break his legs too. I won't really break anyone's legs, but I also won't rest until I tear apart the whole crooked supply chain that made Cit think she needed to be on that bridge. They **will** pay for what they stole from her.

Jerry Barkley is going to help me make lemonade for Citrus Greene. That's a promise.



## Citrus Greene, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2013

Jesse Jonsen visited the shelter today. She brought me a new scarf, hat, and gloves. And a real purse to put them all in. I can't stop admiring it. My new purse has pockets everywhere, and the main compartment is big enough to hold my scarf, hat, gloves, and hairbrush. It's bright white, not dingy grey like my old purse. It feels soft, but sturdy enough that I won't need to repair it with duct tape anytime soon. It even smells new.

This is the first time since high school that anyone has given me a Christmas present. Today is the happiest day of my life. I feel like a millionaire!

The meds and therapy are helping with my Schizophrenia. I can feel it. The shapes might come back, but if they do, I know more about how to deal with them now. Someday, I may even make them go away for good. I would like that.

I signed up for classes starting in January. If things go well, I'll be ready for my GED test in six months. From there, the sky's the limit.

Jesse Jonsen saved my life. Even though I'm six inches taller than her, she will always be my big sister. She taught me how to turn lemons into lemonade. And for that, I will always be grateful.

Merry Christmas!

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A note to readers:

Thanks for reading my short story.

Curious about how Cit's cash card number ended up for sale on an underground Russian website? And Jesse Jonsen's plan to fight back?

Find out in my book, "Bullseye Breach," available everywhere books are sold. See my book website, <http://www.bullseyebreach.com> for more information.

Both "Citrus Greene," and the "Bullseye Breach" world that spawned it, are fiction. Every character came straight out of my imagination. Well, sort-of. Like all fiction, they were inspired by real-world events. A one paragraph story, buried inside the St. Paul Pioneer Press,

about a person who committed suicide after becoming one of millions of real-world Target breach victims in 2013 inspired “Citrus Greene.”

Identity theft is a scourge of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. If you’re interested in what we can do about it, contact me via my “Bullseye Breach” website.