



T H E P L A N T

by Stephen King

part two of a novel in progress

P H I L T R U M P R E S S

Bangor, Maine 2000



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S Y N O P S I S

JOHN KENTON, who attended Brown University, majored in English, and was president of the Literary Society, has had a rude awakening in the real world: he is one of four editors at Zenith House, a down-at-the-heels paperback publisher in New York.

Zenith has 2% of the paperback market and is fifteenth in a field of fifteen paperback publishers. All of the Zenith House personnel are worried that Apex, the parent corporation, may decide to put the house on the market if there isn't a sales turnaround in the calendar year 1981...and due to Zenith's poor distribution network, that seems unlikely.

On January 4th of 1981, Kenton receives a query letter from CARLOS DETWEILLER, of Central Falls, Rhode Island. Detweiller, twenty-three, works in the Central Falls House of Flowers, and is hawking a book he has written called *True Tales of Demon Infestations*. It's obvious to Kenton that Detweiller has absolutely no talent as a writer...but then, neither do most of the writers on Zenith's roster (biggest seller: the *Macho Man* series). He encourages Detweiller to submit sample chapters and an outline. Instead, Detweiller submits the work entire, which is even more abysmal than Kenton—who thought that the book could perhaps be cut down, ghost-written, and juiced up for *The Amityville Horror* audience—would have believed in his worst nightmares. Yet the worst nightmare of all is in the photographs Detweiller encloses. Some are painfully faked pictures of a séance in progress, but a series of four show a gruesomely realistic human sacrifice, in which an old man's chest is cut open and a dripping human heart is pulled out of the incision.

The story, which is told in epistolary style, resumes with a letter from John Kenton to his fiancée, RUTH TANAKA, who is working on her PhD in California.

* * * * *

January 30, 1981

Dear Ruth,

Yes, it was good to talk to you last night, too. Even when you're on the other side of the country, I don't know what I'd do without you. I think this has been just about the worst month of my life, and without you to talk to and your warm support, I don't know how I could have gotten through it. The initial terror and revulsion of those pictures was bad, but I've discovered I can deal with terror—and Roger may be locked in his impersonation of some crusty editor in a Damon Runyon story (or maybe it's that Ben Hecht play I'm thinking of), but the funny thing is, he really does have a heart of gold. When all that shit came down, he was like a rock—his support never wavered.

Terror is bad, but the feeling that you've been a horse's ass is a lot worse, I've found. When you're afraid, you can fall back on your bravery. When you're humiliated, I guess you just have to call up your fiancée long distance and bawl on her shoulder. All I'm saying, I guess, is thanks—thanks for being there and thanks for not laughing...or calling me a hysterical old woman jumping at shadows.

I had one final phone-call last night after I'd talked to you—from Chief Barton Iverson of the Central Falls P.D. He was also remarkably forgiving, but before I give you the final gist of it, let me try to clarify the whole sequence of events following my reception of the Detweiller manuscript last Wednesday. Your confusion was justifiable—I think I can be a little clearer now that I've had a night's sleep (and without Ma Bell in my ear, chipping off the dollars from my malnourished paycheck!).

As I *think* I told you, Roger's reaction to the "Sacrifice Photos" was even stronger and more immediate than mine. He came down to my office as if he had rockets in his heels, leaving two distributors waiting in his outer office (and, as I believe Flannery O'Connor once pointed out, a good distributor is hard to find), and when I showed him the pictures, he turned pale, put his hand over his mouth, and made some extremely unlovely gagging sounds so I guess you'd have to say I was more right than wrong about the *quality* of the photos (considering the subject matter, "quality" is a strange word to use, but it's the only one that seems to fit).

He took a minute or two to think, then told me I'd better call the police in Central Falls—but not to say anything to anybody else.

"They could still be fakes," he said, "but it's best not to take any chances. Put 'em in an envelope and don't touch them anymore. There could be fingerprints."

"They don't *look* like fakes," I said. "Do they?"

"No."

He went back to the distributors and I called the cops in Central Falls—my *first* conversation with Iverson. He listened to the whole story and then took my telephone number. He said he'd call me back in five minutes, but he didn't tell me why.

He was actually back in about three minutes. He told me to take the photographs to the 31st Precinct at 140 Park Avenue South, and that the New York Police would wire the "Sacrifice Photos" to Central Falls.

"We should have them by three this afternoon," he said. "Maybe even sooner."

I asked him what he intended to do until then.

"Not much," he said. "I'm going to send a plainclothesman around to this House of Flowers and try to ascertain whether or not Detweiller is still working there. I hope to do that without arousing any suspicions. Until I see the pictures, Mr. Kenton, that's really all I can do."

I had to bite my tongue to keep from telling him that I thought there was a *lot more* he could do. I didn't want to be dismissed as a typical pushy

New Yorker, and I didn't want to have this fellow exasperated with me from the jump. And I reminded myself that Iverson hadn't seen the pictures. Under the circumstances I guess he was going as fast as he could on the basis of a call from a stranger—a stranger who might be a crank.

I got him to promise he'd call me back as soon as he got the photographs, and then I took them down to the 31st Precinct myself. They were expecting me; a Sergeant Tyndale met me in the reception area and took the envelope of photographs. He also made me promise I'd stay at the office until I'd heard from them.

"The Central Falls Chief of Police—"

"Not *him*," Tyndale said, as if I was talking about a trained monkey. "Us."

All the movies and novels are right, babe—it doesn't take long before you start feeling like a criminal yourself. You expect somebody to turn a bright light in your face, hook one leg over a beat-up old desk, lean down, blow cigarette smoke in your face, and say "Okay, Carmody, where did you put the bodies?" I can laugh about it now, but I sure wasn't laughing then.

I wanted Tyndale to take a look at the photos and tell me what he thought of them—whether or not they were authentic—but he just shooed me out with another reminder to "stick close," as he put it. It had started to rain and I couldn't get a cab and by the time I'd walked the seven blocks back to Zenith House I was soaked. I had also eaten half a roll of Tums.

Roger was in my office. I asked him if the distributors were gone, and he flapped a hand in their direction. "Sent one back to Queens and one back to Brooklyn," he said. "Inspired. They'll sell another fifty copies of *Ants from Hell* between them. Schmucks." He lit a cigarette. "What did the cops say?"

I told him what Tyndale had told me.

"Ominous," he said. "Very fooking ominous."

"They looked real to you, didn't they?"

He considered, then nodded. "Real as rain."

"Good."

“What do you mean, good? There’s nothing good about *any* of this.”

“I only meant—”

“Yeah, I know what you meant.” He got up, shook the legs of his pants the way he always does, and told me to call if I heard from anybody. “And don’t say anything to anyone else.”

“Herb’s looked in here a couple of times,” I said. “I think he thinks you’re going to fire me.”

“The idea has some merit. If he asks you right out—”

“Lie.”

“Right.”

“Always a pleasure to lie to Herb Porter.”

He stopped again at the door, started to say something, and then Riddley, the mailroom kid, came by pushing a basket of rejected manuscripts.

“You been in there most de mawnin, Mist’ Adler,” he said. “Is you gwine t’fire Mist’ Kenton?”

“Get out of here, Riddley,” Roger said, “and if you don’t stop insulting your entire race with that disgusting Rastus accent I’ll fire *you*.”

“Yassuh, Mist’ Adler!” Riddley said, and got his mail basket rolling again. “I’s goan! I’s goan!”

Roger looked at me and rolled his eyes despairingly. “As soon as you hear,” he repeated, and went out.

I heard from Chief Iverson early that afternoon. Their man had ascertained that Detweiller was at the House of Flowers, business as usual. He said that the House of Flowers is a neat long frame building on a street that’s “going downhill” (Iverson’s phrase). His man went in, got two red roses, and walked out again. Mrs. Tina Barfield, the proprietor of record according to the papers on file at City Hall, waited on him. The fellow who actually got the flowers, cut them, and wrapped them, was wearing a name tag with the word CARLOS on it. Iverson’s man described him as about twenty-five, dark, not bad looking, but portly. The man said he seemed very intense; didn’t smile much.

There's an exceptionally long greenhouse behind the shop. Iverson's man commented on it and Mrs. Barfield told him it was as deep as the block; she said they called it "the little jungle."

I asked Iverson if he'd gotten the wirephotos yet. He said he hadn't, but wanted to confirm for me that Detweiller *was* there. Just knowing he was brought me some relief—I don't mind telling you that, Ruth.

So here's Act III, Scene I, and the plot sickens, as us guys in the prose-biz like to say. I got a call from Sergeant Tyndale, at the 31st Precinct. He told me that Central Falls had gotten the pictures, that Iverson had taken one look, and had ordered Carlos Detweiller brought in for questioning. Tyndale wanted me down at the 31st right away to make a statement. I was to bring the *Demon Infestations* manuscript with me, and all my Detweiller correspondence. I told him I would be happy to come down to the 31st as soon as I talked to Iverson again; in fact, I'd be willing to catch The Pilgrim at Penn Station and train right up there to—

"Please don't call anyone," Tyndale said, "and don't go anywhere—*anywhere*, Mr. Kenton—until you've beat your feet down here and make a statement."

I'd spent the day feeling upset and on edge. My nervous condition was getting worse rather than better, and I suppose I snapped at the guy. "You sound as though I'm the one under suspicion."

"No," he said. "No, Mr. Kenton." A pause. "Not as of now." Another pause. "But he did send *you* the pictures, didn't he?"

For a moment I was so flabbergasted I could only flap my mouth like a fish. Then I said, "But I explained that."

"Yes, you did. Now come down here and explain it for the record, please." Tyndale hung up, leaving me feeling both angry and sort of existential—but I'd be lying, Ruth, if I didn't tell you that mostly what I felt was scared—I'd gotten in far over my head, and it hadn't taken long at all.

I popped into Roger's office, told him what was going on as quickly and sanely as I could, and then headed for the elevator. Riddley came out of the mailroom wheeling his Dandux cart—empty, this time.

“Is you in trouble wid de law, Mist Kenton?” he whispered hoarsely as I went past him—I tell you, Ruth, it did nothing at all to improve my peace of mind.

“No!” I said, so loudly that two people going up the hall looked around at me.

“Cause if you is, my cousin Eddie is sho one fine lawyer. Yassuh!”

“Riddley,” I said, “where did you go to college?”

“Co’nell, Mist Kenton, and it sho was fine!” Riddley grinned, showing teeth as white as piano keys (and just as numerous, one is tempted to believe).

“If you went to Cornell,” I said, “why in God’s name do you talk that way?”

“What way is dat, Mist Kenton?”

“Never mind,” I said, glancing at my watch. “It’s always fine to have one of these philosophical discussions with you, Riddley, but I’ve got an appointment and I ought to run.”

“Yassuh!” He said, flashing that obscene grin again. “And if you want my cousin Eddie’s phone numbah—”

But by then I had escaped into the hall. It’s always a relief to get free of Riddley. I suppose it’s terrible to say this, but I wish Roger would fire him—I look at that big piano-key grin and, God help me, I wonder if Riddley hasn’t made a pact to drink white man’s blood when the fire comes next time. Along with his cousin, Eddie, of course.

Well, forget all that—I’ve been tickling the typewriter keys for over an hour and a half, and this is starting to look like a novelette. I had better scamp through the rest. So...Act III, Scene II.

I arrived at the police station late and soaking wet all over again—no cabs and the rain had become a good steady downpour. Only a January rain in New York City can be that cold (California looks better to me every day, Ruth!).

Tyndale took a look at me, offered a thin smile with no noticeable humor in it, and said: “Central Falls just released your author. No cabs out there, huh? Never are when it rains.”

“They let Detweiller *go*?” I asked incredulously. “And he’s not our author. I wouldn’t touch him with a ten-foot-plague-pole.”

“Well, whatever he is, the whole thing’s nothing but a tempest in a teapot,” he said, handing me what may have been the vilest cup of coffee I have ever drunk in my life.

He took me into a vacant office, which was something of a mercy—that sense that the others in the squadroom were sneaking peeks at the prematurely balding editor in the drippy tweeds was probably paranoid, but it was pretty strong just the same.

To make a long story even longer, about forty-five minutes after the wirephotos had arrived, and about fifteen minutes after Detweiller had arrived (not handcuffed, but flanked by two burly men in blue-suits), the plainclothesman who had been dispatched to the House of Flowers after my original call arrived. He had been on the other side of town all afternoon.

They had left Detweiller alone in a small interrogation room, Tyndale told me, to soften him up—to get him thinking all sorts of nasty thoughts. The plainclothesman who had verified the fact that Detweiller was indeed still working at the House of Flowers was looking at the “Sacrifice Photos” when Chief Iverson came out of his office and headed for the interrogation room where Detweiller was being kept.

“Jesus,” the plainclothesman said to Iverson, “these look almost real, don’t they?”

Iverson stopped. “Do you have any reason to believe they aren’t?” he asked.

“Well, when I went into that flower-shop this morning to check on that guy Detweiller, this dude getting the informal heart-surgery was sitting off to one side behind the counter, playing solitaire and watching *Ryan’s Hope* on TV.”

“Are you *sure* of that?” Iverson demanded.

The plainclothesman tapped the first of the “Sacrifice Photos,” where the face of the “victim” was clearly shown. “No mistake,” he said. “This guy.”

“Well why in God’s name didn’t you *say* he was there?” Iverson demanded, no doubt with visions of Detweiller bringing charges of false and malicious detainment beginning to dance dolefully in his head.

“Because no one asked me about *this* guy,” the detective said, reasonably enough. “I was supposed to verify Detweiller, which I did. If somebody had asked me to verify this guy, I would have. No one did. See you.” And he walked away, leaving Iverson holding the bag.

So that was that.

I looked at Tyndale.

Tyndale looked back at me.

After a moment or two he softened. “For whatever it’s worth, Mr. Kenton, that particular photo *did* look real...real as hell. But so do the effects in some of these horror movies. There’s one guy—Tom Savini—and the effects he does—”

“So they let him go.” A dread was surfacing inside my head like one of those little Russian submarines the Swedes are never quite able to trap.

“For whatever else it’s worth, your ass is covered with three sets of skivvies and four sets of pants, the middle two sets iron-clad,” Tyndale said, and then added, with a sobriety that was positively Alexander Haigian: “I’m speaking legally-wise, you understand. You acted in good faith, as a citizen. If the guy could prove malice, that would be one thing...but hell, you didn’t even know him.”

The submarine came up a little more. Because I felt right then like I was *starting* to know him, Ruth, and my feelings about Carlos Detweiller were not then and are not now anything I would describe as jolly or benign.

“Besides, it’s never the informant they want to sue for false arrest anyway—it’s the cop who came and read them their rights and then took them downtown in a car with no doorhandles in the back doors.”

Informant. That was the source of the dread. The submarine was all the way up, floating on the surface like a dead fish in the moonlight. *Informant.* I didn’t know Carlos Detweiller from a psychic begonia...but *he* knew something about *me*. Not that I was the head of the Brown University literary soci-

ety, or that I'm prematurely balding, or that I'm engaged to marry a pretty miss from Pasadena named Ruth Tanaka...not any of those things (and please God, not my home address, *never* my home address), but he knows *I'm the editor who had him taken into custody for a murder he did not commit.*

"Do you know," I asked him, "if Iverson or anyone else at the Central Falls Police Department mentioned me to him by name?"

Tyndale lit a cigarette. "No," he said, "but I'm pretty sure no one there did."

"Why not?"

"It would have been unprofessional. When you're building a case—even one that dies as fast as this one did—every name the perp doesn't know or even *might* not know becomes a poker chip."

Any relief I might have felt was short-lived.

"But the guy would have to be pretty dumb *not* to know. Unless, that is, he mailed the photos to every publisher in New York. Think he might have done that?"

"No," I said dismally. "No other publisher in New York would have responded to his query letter in the first place."

"I see."

Tyndale was up, clearing away the styrofoam coffee cups, making those end-of-the-party gestures that meant he was hoping I'd put an egg in my shoe and beat it.

"One more question and I'll get out of your hair," I said. "The other photos were obvious fakes. Pitiful. How come they look so bad and these other fakes look so damn good?"

"Maybe Detweiller himself set up the 'Sakred Seance' photos and someone else—Central Fall's answer to Tom Savini, say—made up the 'sacrifice victim.' Or maybe Detweiller did them all and purposely made the other ones look bad so you'd take these more seriously."

"Why would he do that?"

"So you'd stub your toe just the way you have, maybe. Maybe that's how he gets off."

“But he got arrested in the process!”

He looked at me, almost pityingly. “Here’s a guy who’s in a bar, Mr. Kenton, and he’s got these cigarette loads. So just for a joke, he loads up one of his buddy’s cigarettes while his buddy’s in the john or picking out some tunes on the juke. Seems to him like the funniest idea in the world at the time, even though the buddy’s sense of humor only begins when a load explodes in someone *else’s* cigarette, and the guy doing the loading *now* should know it. So the buddy comes back, and pretty soon he gets to the loaded pill. Takes two puffs and *ka-bang!* Tobacco all over his face, powder-burns on his fingers, and he spills his beer in his lap. And his buddy—his *previous* buddy—is sitting there on the next stool, just about laughing himself into a hemorrhage. Do you see all that?”

“Yes,” I said reluctantly, because I did.

“Now the guy loading the cigarette was not a feeb, although I got to say that in my own personal estimation a guy who thinks loading another guy’s cigarette is funny is a little bit deficient in the *sensa-yuma* department. But even if his *sensa-yuma* starts with some guy getting the shit scared out of him and spilling his beer all over his balls, you’d think a guy who wasn’t a feeb would be at least interested enough in keeping his teeth inside his head not to do it. Yet they do. They do it all the fucking time. Now, being a literary man—”

(He obviously didn’t know about *Gash Me, My Darling, Ants from Hell*, and the forthcoming *Flies from Hell*, Ruth)

“—can you tell me *why* he goes ahead, and ends up picking his teeth up offa the bar on account of he might be able to hawk the fillings?”

“Because he has no sense of futurity,” I said dismally, and for the first time, Ruth, I felt as if I could really *see* Carlos Detweiler.

“Huh? I don’t know that word.”

“He doesn’t know—isn’t able to see ahead to the outcome.”

“Yeah, you’re a literary man, all right. I couldn’t have said it that good in a thousand years.”

“And that’s my answer?”

“That’s your answer.” He clapped me on the shoulder and led me toward the door. “Go home, Mr. Kenton. Have a drink, a shower, and then another drink. Watch some TV. Get a night’s sleep. You did your duty as a citizen, for Christ’s sake. Most people would have just tossed those pictures aside...or saved them for their scrapbooks. That sounds weird, but I’m a police-type guy, not a literary-type guy, and I know that some people do that, too. Go home. Forget it. And content yourself with this—if the guy’s book is as bad as you said, you just sent him one hell of a rejection slip.”

So I did just what he said, m’darling—went home, had a drink, had a shower, had a meal, had another drink, watched TV, went to bed. Then after about three hours in the rack with no sleep—I kept seeing that picture, with the slit in the chest and the dripping heart—I got up, had about three more drinks, watched a John Wayne movie called *Wake of the Red Witch* on TV (John Wayne looks a lot better in a GI helmet than he does in a diving helmet, I want to tell you), went to bed again, and woke up with a hangover.

It’s been a couple of days since all of this went down, and I think—*think*—that things are beginning to return to normal, both at Zenith House and inside my head. I think (*think*) it’s over—but it’s going to be one of those Incidents that haunt me all my life, I guess, like the dreams I used to have as a kid in which I stood up to salute the flag and my pants fell down. Or, even better, there was the time Bill Gelb, my illustrious co-editor at Zenith, told me about. He said he told this joke to a guy at a cocktail party: *How do you stop five black guys from raping a white chick? Answer: give them a basketball.* “I thought the guy I told it to just had a good tan until he threw his drink in my face and walked away,” Bill said. That’s the kind of story I could never tell on myself, which may be one of the reasons I haven’t lost all of my respect for Bill, although he’s a bigoted, lazy, horse’s ass. All of which is to say I feel sort of like a horse’s ass...but at least it’s over. If all of this seems to make me a hysteric—someone who would eagerly testify at the Salem witch-trials—please write and break our engagement soonest...because if that’s the case, I wouldn’t marry me either.

As for me, I’m sort of clinging to what Tyndale said—that I acted in

good faith as a citizen. The one thing I'll not do is send you the photos, which were returned to me today. They might give you the sort of dreams I've been having—and those dreams are definitely ungood. I've come to the conclusion that all special effects wizards must be frustrated surgeons. In fact, if Roger gives me the okay, I'm going to burn them.

I love you, Ruth.

Your adoring horse's ass,

John

from the office of the editor-in-chief

TO: John Kenton

DATE: 2/2/81

MESSAGE: Go ahead and burn them. I never want to hear about Carlos Detweiller again.

Listen, John—a little excitement's fine, but if we don't start some action here at Zenith, we're all going to be looking for jobs. I've heard that Apex may be hunting buyers. Which is like looking for dodo birds or pterodactyls. We've *got* to have a book or books that will make some noise by this summer, and that means we better start looking yesterday. Start shaking the trees, okay?

Roger

interoffice memo

TO: Roger
FROM: John
RE: Tree-shaking

What trees? Zenith House exists on the Great Plains of American publishing, and you damned well know it.

John

from the office of the editor-in-chief

TO: John Kenton
DATE: 2/3/81

MESSAGE: Find a tree or find a job. That's all there is, sweets.

Roger

February 4, 1981

Mr. John "Judas Priest" Kenton
Zenith Asshole-House, Publishers of Kaka
490 Avenue of Dog-Shit
New York, New York 10017

Dear Judas,

This is the thanks I get for giving you my book. Okay, I understand. I should have known what to expect. You think you are SO SMART. Okay. I understand. You are really nothing but a dirty betraying bastard. How much have you stolen. Plenty, I would guess. You think you are SO SMART but you are nothing but a "Warped Plank" in "the GREAT FLOOR OF THE UNIVERSE." There are ways to deal with GUYS LIKE YOU. You probably think I am going to come and get you. But I am not. I would not "dirty my hands with your dirt," as Mr. Keen used to say. But I can fix you if I want. And I want! I WANT!!!!

Meantime you have spoiled everything here so I suppose you are satisfied. That doesn't matter. I have gone West. I would say "fuck you" but who would. Not me. I wouldn't even if I was a girl and you were Richard Gear. I wouldn't if you was some really neat girl with a good build.

Well I am going away but my material is copyright and I just hope you know what copyright is even if you don't know "shit" from "shoe-polish." So you just put that in your pipe and smoke it all the day long Mr. Judas Kenton. Goodbye.

I hate you,

Carlos Detweiller
In Transit
U.S. of A.

February 7, 1981

Dear Ruth,

I had sort of expected a “fuck-you” letter from Carlos Detweiller—it was in the back of my mind, anyway—and I got a dilly just the other day. I employed Zenith House’s creaky pre-World War I Xerox machine to make a copy, and have enclosed it with this letter. In his anger he is almost lyrical—I especially like the line about me being a warped plank in the floor of the universe...a phrase even Carlyle might admire. He misspelled Richard Gere’s name, but maybe that was artistic license. On the whole, I’d say I feel relieved—it’s over, at least. The guy has struck out for the Great American West, undoubtedly with his rose-cutting shears slung low on one hip (on one rose-hip? oh, forget it).

“Yeah, but is he really gone?” you ask. The answer is, yes he is.

I got the letter yesterday and rang up Barton Iverson of the Central Falls Police almost at once (after getting Roger’s grudging approval for the long distance, I might add). I thought Iverson would go along with my request to check matters out, and he did. Seems he too thought the “sacrifice photos” were too real for comfort, and the latest Detweiller communication *does* have a rather threatening tone. He sent a man named Riley—the same man who went before, I think—to check out Carlos, and he (Iverson, not Riley) called me back in ninety minutes. It seems that Detweiller served his notice almost right after being released from custody, and the Barfield woman has even advertised for a new florist’s assistant in the local newspapers.

One mildly interesting thing: Riley checked on the guy in the “sacrifice photos,” and came up with a name I know: It was Mr. Norville Keen, the same guy, I’m pretty sure, that Detweiller mentioned in his first two letters

(“Why describe a guest when you can see that guest,” and other pearls of wisdom). The cop asked her a few questions about the staging of those photos, and the Barfield woman clammed up, ka-bang, just like that. Asked him if it was an official investigation, or what. It isn’t, of course, so that was that...and in my mind, the whole subject is closed. Iverson told me that Riley can’t “make” the Barfield woman from *any* of the photos, so there was no handle to question her further...not that anyone there in Central Falls really wants to, I think. Iverson was very frank with me. “Let sleeping weirdos lay,” was what he actually said, and I agree two hundred per cent.

If the new Anthony LaScorbia novel turns out to be *Plants from Hell*, though, I’m quitting.

I’ll write you a more normal letter later in the week, I hope, but I thought you’d want to know how it all turned out. Meanwhile, I’m back to spending my nights on my novel and my days looking for a bestseller we can buy for \$2,500. As I believe President Lincoln once said, “Good fucking luck, turkey.”

Meantime, thanks for your phone call, and your last missive. And in answer to your question, yeah, I’m also H*O*R*N*Y.

My love,

John

February 19, 1981

Dear Mr. Kenton,

You don't know me, but I sort of know you. My name is Roberta Solrac, and I am an avid reader of Anthony LaScorbia's series of novels. Like Mr. LaScorbia, I feel that ecology is about to revolt!!! Anyway, I wrote Mr. LaScorbia a "fan letter" last month and he answered me! I was very excited and honored, so I sent him a dozen roses. He said he was excited and honored (to get the roses) as no one had ever sent him flowers before.

Anyway, in our correspondence, he mentioned your name and said you were responsible for his literary triumphs. I can't send you roses as I am "broke," but I am sending you a small plant for your office, via UPS. It is supposed to bring good luck.

Hope this finds you well, and keep up the good work!!!

*Yours most sincerely,
Roberta Solrac*

interoffice memo

TO: Roger
FROM: John
RE: Ongoing insanity

Take a look at the enclosed letter, Roger. Then spell "Solrac" backwards. I think I really am going crazy. What did I do to deserve this guy?

from the office of the editor-in-chief

TO: John Kenton

DATE: 2/23/81

MESSAGE: Maybe you're jumping at shadows. If not, what do you want to do about it? Re-open things with the Central Falls P.D.? Assuming this is Detweiller—and I admit the last name soars into the outer limits of the coincidental and the style bears a certain similarity, although it's obviously a different typewriter—it's just, if I may wax alliterative, a harmless helping of little-kid harassment. My advice is forget it. If "Roberta Solrac" sends you a plant in the mail, dump it down the incinerator chute. It's probably poison ivy. You're letting this get on your nerves, John. I tell you this seriously: *Forget it.*

Roger

interoffice memo

TO: Roger

FROM: John

RE: "Roberta Solrac"

Poison ivy, my ass. The guy worked in a greenhouse. It's probably deadly nightshade, or belladonna, or something like that.

John

from the office of the editor-in-chief

TO: John Kenton

DATE: 2/23/81

MESSAGE: I thought about shagging my butt down the hall to talk to you, but I'm expecting a call from Harlow "The Axeman Cometh" Enders in a few minutes, and don't want to be out of my office. But maybe it's better that I write this down anyway, because you don't seem to really believe anything unless it's in print.

John, let this go. The Detweiller thing is over. I know the whole business knocked you for a loop—hell, it did me, too—but you've got to let it go. We have got some serious problems here in-house, just in case you didn't know it. There's going to be a re-evaluation of what we're up to in June, and what were up to is not much. This means we could all be out on our asses in September. Our "year of grace" has begun to shrink. Quit worrying about Detweiller and for Christ's sake find something I can publish that will make money.

I can't make myself clearer. I love you, John, but let this go and get back to work, or I'm going to have to make some hard choices.

Roger

interoffice memo

TO: Riddley
FROM: John Kenton
RE: Possible incoming package

I have an idea that I may be receiving a UPS package from somewhere in the midwest during the next week to ten days. The sender's name is Roberta Solrac. If you see such a package, make sure I don't. In other words, dump it immediately down the nearest incinerator chute. I suspect you know most of what there is to know about the Detweiller business. This may be associated with that, and the contents of the package could be dangerous. Unlikely, but in the realm of possibility.

Thanking you,

John Kenton

interoffice memo

TO: John Kenton
FROM: Riddley
RE: Possible incoming package

Yassuh, Mist Kenton!

Riddley / Mail Room

from THE SAKRED BOOK OF CARLOS

SAKRED MONTH OF FEBBA (Entry #64)

I know how to get him. I have set things in motion, praise Abbalah. Praise Green Demeter. I'll get them all. Green Green "must be seen." Ha! You Judas! Little do you know! But I know! All about your girlfriend, too — only girlfriend is now girlFIEND, little do you know what she is up to! There is another mule kicking in your stall, Mr. Judas Big=Shot Editor! OUIJA says this mule's name is GARY! In my dreams I have seen them and GARY is HAIRY! Not like you, you wimpy little JUDAS! Soon I'm sending you a present! Everyone prospers! Every Judas safe in the arms of Abbalah! Come Abbalah! COME GREAT DEMETER!

COME GREEN!