

[EXCERPT FROM CROWLEY'S CULT, CHAPTER 2: STRANGE EVENTS]

A few days later, Zane's in his art studio. It's a large room with glass doors that he leaves open when he's painting, even in winter. The view from there is spectacular. That part of the garden was designed from his own drawings. It has a stone-rimmed koi pond filled with beautiful carp of various colors.

Despite the incessant text messages and phone calls, he feels compelled to paint. He takes a palette and squeezes paint from a few tubes onto it. As usual, he positions the easel so that he can admire the view outside, though his paintings have absolutely nothing to do with what he sees.

At first, Zane feels strange. The feeling of being watched persists, and it bothers him. He starts painting, using mostly red and purple. The strokes come almost instinctively. As the painting takes shape, he feels a deep ecstasy.

Only a few hours later, the painting is complete. He's astonished at how he finished painting such a large canvas in such a short time. Furthermore, he'd had no source of inspiration from which to paint. For the first time, Zane hadn't seen the final image in his mind before starting to paint. He'd just painted what he was feeling without realizing it.

Zane looks more closely at the painting. Although the image can still be easily identified as his creation, the sexual content is so explicit that it frightens him. Suddenly, he senses a presence admiring the painting behind him, so close that he can feel the breath on his neck. Zane turns around so quickly that he almost falls off his seat. But there's no one there.

He giggles nervously and feels silly for being spooked by his own imagination. But even though he's alone in the house, he still has the feeling that there's someone watching him.