

The Art of Madness

by Marda Miller

"It is not easy being crazy. It is not easy waking up in the middle of the night convinced that what remains of your dismal existence is about to melt into oblivion. The voices get so loud sometimes. Night time is never fun and no one can ever convince me otherwise."

This is a story about a shopping cart guy named Karl. Actually his real name was Vladimir but Karl is the name that the workers of the Super-Mart gave him. They all watched as he made his daily visits to the store parking lot, collecting the shopping carts that people had left scattered about. He was not employed by the Super-Mart, in fact he was not employed at all. He was just the shopping cart guy and that is how he would remain. None of them ever really paid much attention to what would have seemed like a maddening agenda. They all just passed him off as another crazy man who most likely had no family, no home and nothing better to do than to accumulate the randomly dispersed metal wagons from the massive concrete field.

"Madness is incurable and stays with you for life. There is no way to avoid it so you just have to accept it. There is no sense in denying the fact that you must remain all alone. No, you cannot expect to maintain engaging friendships when you have no certainty of knowing who you are at any given moment. But don't worry, eventually that all passes. You'll begin to see there is no end to anything, just eventuality. To think that there is a beginning and an end is to adopt the idea that we are somehow linear. Yet our world is undeniably round and everything in it spins in circles. Like weather patterns, life moves in deliberate cycles. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no end, only eventuality."

Karl had experienced more in his forty two years than most people would have cared to imagine. The events which shaped his life had a

Available online at [«http://fictionaut.com/stories/marda-miller/the-art-of-madness»](http://fictionaut.com/stories/marda-miller/the-art-of-madness)

Copyright © 2012 Marda Miller. All rights reserved.

rather disturbing effect on the way he presently displayed himself, though he was not one to take pity on himself so he never made excuses. It would have been incomprehensibly shocking if the Super-Mart employees knew that Karl was not a victim of circumstance, as they had all presumed, but actually chose to be there in that particular parking lot pushing around metal tins for countless hours on end. He had a purpose and to him that was presently more important than anything else. But no one paid attention.

When he was known as Vladimir, he was employed as a nuclear physicist by the government of a country that was in the process of generating a mass amount of weapons. Mainly, he was responsible for assisting in the creation of one that could obliterate entire cities in a matter of seconds. He had an addiction to elevating himself to higher levels of potential: some would call this ambition. He was also awkwardly oblivious to what it was exactly that he was creating since he was so immersed in becoming self aggrandized.

It seemed rather misplaced for Vladimir to be working under such circumstances since he himself was not hostile or aggressive by nature. He lived in a quaint suburban neighborhood with his wife and young daughter. On Sundays he would make them waffles then read the newspaper. He wanted to fulfill all that was expected of him so he had promised his wife that after this latest project was completed, they could finally take a holiday together and visit the unseen places in the world; the ones never featured on any travel shows. However, he often lacked the ability to keep promises for once he was focused on something, it was difficult for his attention to be averted.

Time passed and eventually Vladimir had completed, to his satisfaction, a most remarkable device. In his eyes it was a masterpiece of his own genius mind. To the government it was a step towards achieving dominance in a chaotic world that should have paid closer attention.

The order was sent out and the day set itself in history as an appalling tragedy that man had incurred upon himself.

What Vladimir was not aware of was that while he was so intensely involved in the process of implementing this covert government operation, his wife, tired of his unfulfilled promises, had taken their daughter traveling through a country which would soon become the target of a very horrific experiment. The two were sitting on a grassy hilltop gazing out in amazement at the splendor that nature had created. They were smiling and laughing. That was the very last time they ever did.

"It's not easy being crazy. There is no comfort in waking in the middle of the night and realizing that you are completely alone. Denial serves as protection, allowing you the luxury of admitting nothing. You can remain just as you were and never face the fact that your surroundings have transformed into a more horrific reality you could have ever imagined. The doctors can only treat you with the highest doses of little white and pink pills. Of course, there is no actual cure that can ever replace the horrendous images of your wife's dismembered body or your daughter's shattered face."

Karl was past the point of denial. Nothing had any reason or certainty anymore; there was no clear path to follow. His very own existence became arbitrary. For someone with his mental capacity and logical need for a continuous order of all things, life suddenly became unpredictable and uncontrollable, which led to his rejection of rationality.

It is unknown even to him how he ended up in that parking lot. He no longer concerned himself with such details of obscurity. His one and only purpose now was to collect shopping carts at the Super-Mart for he still clung to the idea that all things were dictated by a definitive order and shopping carts were no exception. His observation concluded that the night was best for the collection of

carts as fewer bodies populated the lot upon the fall of darkness, therefore no one was in any danger. Not of him and certainly not of any objects that his hands controlled.

"It's not easy being crazy..." Karl would tell you if you asked him. But nobody ever did. No one paid any attention.

