

Paul Lambrecht  
2306 W. Marlboro Dr.  
Chandler, AZ 85224  
617-905-2613  
[lambrecht@post.harvard.edu](mailto:lambrecht@post.harvard.edu)  
[www.typeabpositive.com](http://www.typeabpositive.com)

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## **THE SURVIVOR AND THE STUDENT**

By Paul Lambrecht

"We're all chasing something," said Fritts, perfectly at peace lounging in his leather chair, "... or someone..." he added after a second.

"Yes, or someone," he added again. "Certainly that which flees..."

Sheila nodded.

Ted couldn't see where this was going. He was too absorbed in the anxious Antipodes he experienced of a habit most mornings. He lived in constant apprehension of his surroundings, as urbane and academic as they were. He had nothing to be afraid of, really, except maybe for finding out how the rest of the group hated him.

They hated him because he seemed the most innocent on the outside, yet inside was the most disturbed, and no one could penetrate that fine-seeming inner box of pain and shame, and so they all thought he was showing off for sympathy.

Of course Fritts knew this, and various others had hinted at it, but nothing had been done to develop this into a potential break-through type situation. It might happen eventually, if someone could find the key, and then Ted could be cured, hopefully forever. Then he would leave and everyone would be glad. Very glad, indeed.

Fritts changed subjects abruptly. "It's as if we all live in a hive," he said. "Some of us are worker bees, some of us are queen bees, some of us are drones, et cetera. It is in fulfilling our allotted role within the hive which permits us to derive satisfaction from our lives."

Ted looked out the window. What a rare perspective, he marveled. Sun on the other buildings on campus, birds chirping. He was feeling overwhelmed. Fritts really could not have looked more comfortable, the others more interested. Fritts looked at Ted. "Ted, if you were a bee, what type of bee would you be?"

This was the worst possible Barbara Walters question he could have been asked. Just answer briefly and honestly, and then they can move on, he thought. Though he really just wanted to escape, he tried thinking about the question.

"If I was a bee, then I don't think I would care what type of bee I was."

Fritts flashed his gap-toothed grin. "That's true, Ted. As a bee, you would not care what type of bee you were. And you would be happy, according to your instinct. Your role in the hive would be the most important thing."

So these emotions people went around feeling were meaningless, is how Ted interpreted this. The reason he couldn't agree with this, however attractive a notion it was, was because something really wanted his feelings to be important. He developed satisfaction by cultivating these loner feelings, this outsider perspective. Maybe I'm some type of rogue bee, he wondered, and was about to share this

with the group, but Fritts was already talking about something else. Now that he actually had something of value to impart, Ted felt ridiculous and ashamed that he had so wanted what was now happening to happen. They had moved on, and he knew beyond that, they didn't give a shit about what he was about to say.

So he bit his tongue and didn't say it. Man, what a fucking waste of time this was. Now look at all the others, hanging intently on every word. Were they actually here to heal their fragmentary thorn-thistly issues? Or were they just gloomy neurotic neophytes pursuing some brand of in vogue self-countenancing?

That he had gone off on a tangent in his own thoughts, satisfied him. There was nothing left to do, then, but wait until the session was over, as he had figured out all he needed to that day. Tia looked over to him and he smiled at her. She glared at him and then back over to Fritts with considerably more respect and mutual adulation. Now he felt bad again, for having been unaccountably happy. Fucking Fritts, perhaps he could explain this strange heresy which Ted had committed but had no control over.

Lord knew, however, what the old krinkly-haired crank was talking about now. He certainly was entertaining, but come on, the others didn't need to be hanging on to his

every word as if it were the freshly unearthed Gospel truth.

"Emily, did you think about anything in particular this morning when you were getting ready for group?" asked Fritts, apropos of a throw-away comment about Freud's multi-phobic personality. Emily was suddenly very self-conscious. As earnestly and carefully as she could, she chose the words for her response. "Well, it's very random. I guess I thought about my mother standing over my bed when I was a little girl, how her perfume used to smell, how grown-up she seemed when my father was taking her out to dinner. And that sketch baby-sitter who used to watch over us." This was followed by a reassuring laugh-track.

"How interesting," said Fritts, but didn't offer any clue as to why.

Ted was ready to jump out the window by this point. How could anything this inane possibly be important? What was the matter with these people? Were they really so fucked up that they took this shit seriously? What were normal people doing this very moment? Were they torturing themselves?

Fritts now sat in deep contemplation: eyes shut, not saying a word. The twitter of birds resonated off the walls, and then the sounds of a lawnmower operating on the

borders of the building. Fritts opened his eyes, then blasted his two-hundred watt gap-toothed grin over all of them. This seemed to break the respectful séance of the sycophantic zombies who shared the room with Ted.

"Always ponder this glorious gift we've been given, that of awareness," Fritts intoned solemnly. Hear hear, thought Ted. Sheila was still entranced by the old mystic, not wanting yet to return to her (dubious?) (trite?) (chaotic?) life.

But why was it Ted, Ted of all people, who seemed so pure on the outside, who seemed to have it all figured out while the cumbuyaing was taking place in front of him, who was the only one leaving that room feeling let-down and confused?

He could ask Fritts, but Fritts had already left in some sense. For the rest of the week, he would be floating like a bee in brilliant sunlight, pausing on all of the beautiful flowers, flirting with all of the malodorous pheromones which waft on a warm summer breeze.

**THE END**