

Dr. Coffee's Pill



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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The Vampire Murders

The Haunting of Alexas Mansion

The Great Debate

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2021

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First Edition: December 2004

Second PDF E-Book Edition: January 2021

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Dr. Coffee entered his office and sipped from his mug, as he took in the sight of the group that was waiting on him. He looked at his watch, as he joined them in the circle of chairs. Dr. Coffee was a psychiatrist who took a special interest in artists. This was his Thursday Artists in Pain group: Frederick Chopin, Vincent van Gogh, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Frida Kahlo. The fact that all of these artists were dead never really fazed Dr. Coffee. He was only concerned with the fact that they were in pain and someone had been willing to pay him the big bucks to

cure them. He'd been meeting with this particular group for several months without a breakthrough. Today, he hoped, he had something up his sleeve that would change that. "Good afternoon, group."

The group returned his greeting, with the exception of Chopin, who only coughed.

"How is everyone feeling today?"

Again, Chopin coughed.

Frida answered, "I've been drinking to drown my pain, but the damned pain learned how to swim."

Vincent and Jean weren't paying attention, really. Vincent was painting on the table. He was painting a yellow sky. Jean looked over at Vincent's painting and wrote the word yellow on the wall. Then he crossed it out.

"Well," the doctor began, "there have been some new developments recently. I hope to share more with you after a brief chat. So, I must ask a question. If I told you that I could take away your pain," he snapped his fingers, "just like that, how many of you would be interested in what I had to say?"

Vincent lost interest in his table painting. "Well...that would be wonderful! Can you do that?" He paused for a moment, giving serious thought to something in silence. "But...would it affect our art? I mean, you're not gonna drug us up so that we can't do our work, are you?"

“That depends, Vincent. It depends on whether or not your art is dependant on your pain. How does the group feel about this question?”

Frida put in, “Well, I've been drugged up before and never lost my spirit. Demerol actually did something for me. It made me happy.”

“Right,” Jean said, “but what did you paint at that time?”

“I painted. The thing is, even when I felt happy, I still had my pain. It was buried deep inside of me at the moment I lost my virginity in that bus wreck.”

The group snickered at this.

“So, what you're saying is that if the doctor takes away your pain, he also takes away your art.”

“Yes,” she said. “I suppose he does.”

“I don't feel that way at all,” Chopin interjected, once his coughing had subsided. “My pain isn't psychological, really. It's this tuberculosis. I think, that if I were rid of it, I would have much more energy to work, much more confidence to tackle grander pieces.”

“But,” Frida argued, “if you didn't have this pain to repress you, your art would be different. You would cease to be unique. You would probably sound just like Liszt.”

Chopin shook his head, and he coughed a little more. “I disagree. I think I would sound like myself, only more alive.”

Vincent looked confused. “I don’t know about this, Dr. Coffee. The more I think about it, the more I realize that my art, some of it anyway, is pain. I mean, sometimes I paint happy things. I paint bright and yellow things. But, I also paint people. Everyday people. Miserable people. Pain is a part of life, and art must reflect that truth. If an artist does not know pain, even the happier artists, like George Sand and Franz Liszt, then how can they truly reflect anything? There would be no balance to any of our work. In order for me to paint joy, and really show it, I must know pain. I must know the antithesis just as intimately.”

“That's a good point,” Chopin conceded. “Still, I would like not to cough anymore. I think a lesser degree of pain wouldn’t hurt my music at all. Not a total elimination, you see. Just a lesser degree.”

Dr. Coffee eyed Basquiat. “Jean, you haven’t said too much.”

The painter shrugged. “I don’t have to.”

“Well, what do you think about this? I gathered from what you said to Frida earlier that you see pain as important to your art. So, what if I could give you a pill that would take away your pain? Do you think that your art would suffer?”

He shrugged, and giggled some. “I think maybe my art has more to do with drugs than pain. The drugs may be dependant on my pain, but the art’s not. Of course, when I cleaned up for a while, people started to say that my art was dead. Then Andy

died. I don't know. I guess I'm not afraid to take a pill to escape the pain. The drugs made me forget that pain, and my art was better that way."

"Of course," Chopin coughed, "the drugs also killed you."

Jean looked at him. "And your cough killed you."

Chopin looked at van Gogh. "Well, at least I didn't chop off my ear lobe and shoot myself."

Frida smiled. "I tried to kill myself several times, after they'd chopped off my leg. It wasn't that hard to die."

Dr. Coffee saw that this was going nowhere. "It seems to me that we have not reached an agreement altogether. From listening to you, I gather that your pain may enhance or color your art in a way that makes it uniquely yours, and your art is brilliant, I must say. However, the price to be paid is that your pain eventually wears you down. It killed all of you. So, I suppose this is a choice that you all will have to make on your own."

Dr. Coffee pulled a prescription bottle from his jacket pocket, and he set it on the table. "I'm going to get some more coffee. While I'm away, you make the choice. This pill will erase your pain. Yes, your art may suffer. I won't lie to you. However, you will live happier, more care-free lives this time around. I leave it in your hands." With that, the doctor left the room.

The group looked each other in the eyes. After a moment, they all nodded, knowing they'd agreed.

Basquiat reached over to the bottle with a brush. The label on the brown container read simply: CONFORMITY. Jean-Michel crossed it out.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of ten books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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