

# The Institute of Meaning and Purpose

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I understand its need, but there's no warranty for madness and the macabre. I'm not discussing potential but potency. At least fear has a guarantee without a price tag.

My hand hurts and Sue's crying again. She always cries. She's got that look on her face. That look, you know? It's not the same as the first time it happened between us, but it's still satisfying. Knowledge isn't power. Control is power. People don't fucking get it. I don't know if I can control things, but at least I can control what I want to know.

Hurting is sensual and personal, and as our eyes meet in a mystical dance of understanding, I can feel that special bond between us. A merging of souls, of destinies, together. I don't call it pain because it's too spiritual to be a bad thing. It's not as though I'm gonna let her die. There's no point in death. I can use these people, re-create them, redeem them from their worst enemy: themselves.

I sometimes wonder what she thinks about it all and what's formed in that pretty little head of hers &mdash; if I'm a God-send, a jailer, or even a monster. After all these years together, I think she likes me. The scars that criss-cross her body are a large, eloquent tapestry of the times we've spent together. They flow together like plots and sub-plots of the stories we've created as a team, each developing character and always independent, with a back-story and memories of mutual understandings that transcend love.

"I really like you," I tell her. "You're my favourite. We're special together, you and me."

The irises in her eyes are completely black. I'm not sure when they last saw the light of day, but she doesn't need it because she has me and the mask. She's mad, and I suspected if from the first day we met at the supermarket. She reminded me of the others, so I removed her.

Like I removed them all.

Her hair feels dry and knotted in my fingers and I force the feeding tube into the hole in the side of her face. She tries to pull away and her scalp tears under my hand. I force the mucus food into her &mdash; almost a full litre. My own special recipe. I think she's lucky. I had a few deaths years ago due to starvation. At least she's alive.

There are so many who need removing. My job in this purpose-built institute is never going to end, and someone has to step up and do what the government can't. My job isn't without its reward. I'm satisfied with my life. I have meaning and purpose. Most people never achieve that. Maslow calls it self-actualisation. Sue used to be a receptionist for some greedy corporate pig, but how can being a receptionist have meaning? Or a truck driver? Council worker? Engineer? Seldom do people have both meaning and purpose.

My dad taught me that, and he was a gentle man, unfortunately, he was also a man of silent regret, but he taught me the importance of meaning and purpose, as did my mother with her constant beatings.

She helped to develop me and I in turn, am developing people like Sue.

I've just remembered I have to sharpen my tools for tonight. I've got a feeling it'll be a late one, so I think I'll have to clean out the toilet tomorrow. My institute of meaning and purpose is full, and I'm running out of room.

"That nice?" I ask, pulling the tube out of Sue's cheek. She looks terrified for some reason, and I replace the mask over her face. She squeals and shuffles like a bound pig.

I move on to my father and lift his mask. He's the most sedate of them all. I force the tube into the side of his face. He's calm. I fill the bottle with a litre of mush from the bucket and feed him.