

The somber cellos kept beating out their dark, rhythmic tattoo as Beethoven's funereal strains moved towards their conclusion.

I shivered again, and turned back to Soul Proprietor. Still holding the phone, he was climbing out of his pickup and into the fog. Now he looked at me dead on, and his eyes seemed huge, as if he had taken LSD. But unlike the wild, vague stare of an acid head, JJ's eyes, his huge eyes, were now totally focused on mine. Our eyes were locked together, synchronized, and our heads swiveled in slow motion as he made his way between LACE, blaring her horn ahead of me, and my own car.

I reached up and locked the door. In return, he flashed me a menacing look that caused me to shiver again. He stopped and cocked his head slightly. A barely perceptible smile gave his face a quizzical look, as if to say, "Do you believe a simple lock can keep me from you?" I thought I saw him shake his head once, but it was too small a movement to be sure it wasn't just an involuntary tic.

And then he was walking again. Time seemed to slow down. I glanced in the mirror at the boy in the BMW behind me who was now watching us. Would he gallantly leap from his car and save me? Did I need saving?

I am not the kind of man who puts much stock in visions or ESP, or that sort of thing, but suddenly I had a premonition that death was near. Had I triggered something murderous in his demented head by locking my door? Was that mechanical act of self-protection his final indignity, one locked door too many?