

My six “guests” Steve, Alexa, Bill, Nate, Juan, and Jessica silently panic in their sudden awareness of their total helplessness and vulnerability. They have no knowledge or control at all over where they are, no direct connection with their bodies, which remain where they had been when I summoned their minds. They will not be able to feel their bodies, except as writhing bundles of tortured nerves whenever I manipulate their senses. They now appear to be arranged around an imaginary conference table in an indistinct and nonexistent executive boardroom without any idea of how they got here, receiving my explanation of the irresistible summons that I have extended to each of them and which brought them here. Lawrence Cromwell Seven Manipulated Minds 4 5 “This is Alfred! You are here to settle an account that you opened in high school, when you tortured me every day of that miserable experience. “Did I ask for so much

back then? To be treated with the respect accorded any other person was all I asked. Instead, all my life, I'd been forced to play by everybody else's rules. I never knew how to change those rules so that I could play on a level playing field. All I ever wanted was to have the simple pleasures, like the friends, parties, and dates that I imagined everybody else my age was having. "What I got instead was to be constantly ostracized because I didn't get the script that the rest of you were following. I always got stuck following and failing at other people's versions of what to talk about, which games I could participate in, what the rules of life were, whether I could ever win at anything, and whose opinions counted. I was always on the outside looking in. "But that wasn't enough punishment to satisfy you six. The physical and psychological abuse that I received from you was what made my life a living hell and is what brought you all here today. "I was at your mercy back then. Now the tables have turned, as you will find out soon enough.

Here, I have total control over everything that you will experience, and for you, that should be terrifying! “I have given you all the ability to see and feel certain things about your new existences, and therefore, the six of you have no doubt recognized one another and me, and you have also noticed that you are suspended perfectly still around this long dimly lit oval conference table, and you are not moving a muscle. Now I know it’s not out of your great respect for me that you are such an attentive audience. And I also know that you would probably be too terrified to move, even if I were to allow it. After all, each of you is now helplessly experiencing a horrifying nightmare you can’t begin to fully comprehend. “But the real reason for your rapt attention is that, in this ‘place,’ which I have created, I alone have the power to control all conscious and some autonomic impulses within your minds, and so you are forced to receive my message and my commands as though they were spoken directly to each of you.

“You are all probably wondering whether you are actually physically present in this room and if there is even a room in which to be present? There has never been a need to physically kidnap you, my former high school classmates. The logistics and legality of such an act would have been far messier than I would ever have wanted to deal with. Instead, I did a little research online and found out where each of you worked and lived, and Lawrence Cromwell Seven Manipulated Minds 6 7 followed you to public places where you were walking alone or sitting alone in your car at a traffic light or were otherwise capable of being isolated and identified. A little tradecraft goes a long way. I then disguised myself and walked by you, carrying a briefcase with my brain wave pattern signal collection device, and scanned your minds as I passed by you without detection. It took mere seconds for the device to do its work. “Using the digital brain wave patterns I collected from each of you, my intended victims, I was able to extend

an irresistible 'invitation' to each of you to join me here in this 'world.' Your lack of physical presence is indistinguishable from really being here from your perspective because I can simulate and project into your minds the real-time images and feelings of your bodies and those of your unfortunate cohorts as being present in this boardroom at the executive boardroom table. For each of you, my guests, the meeting you are attending with your former classmates is reality, though inexplicable and completely terrifying due to your total lack of control over your predicament. I have created in each of your minds the suggestion that you regard me as an omnipotent and omniscient demigod with totally evil intention toward all of you. "The manner in which you have each arrived in the boardroom, in this nonexistent building, suggests a powerful technology that has plucked you out of an otherwise typical day. Each of you had been going about your daily lives with no thoughts of me or of one another. After all, it has been eight years

since we left high school, and I had never occupied anyone's thoughts other than for ridicule or pity nor commanded anybody's respect or acknowledgment even when I was in the same room as you were. But at about 10:00 a.m., wherever you were and whatever you were doing, you began to hear a strange musical tune in your minds, followed by a brief dizziness and loss of consciousness. The next instant, each of you awoke and noticed your new situation and surroundings while your real bodies and brains continued to function somewhat normally, if absentmindedly, in the physical world. If any of you were driving a car or performing neurosurgery at that time, the being that was left behind became slightly less capable than normal but not dangerously so. Such is the power of the human mind, that I can borrow the part of your consciousness that I am now addressing without doing any physical harm. It's enough, you'll see, to accomplish my wishes. You also recognized one another, as I've said, and of course, you know

my distinct voice. At seeing my image and hearing my voice clearly in your minds, you undoubtedly felt deep regret and horror at your new situation. Did I say regret? Maybe not yet, but that will come, I assure you. “That about sums up the how, when, and where of your presence here today. But what about the why, as in why all of you are here?”