

Fulton's Garden

by Martin Rose

BEGIN TRANSMISSION

From: GreekKorus

To: Isaac Covington, James Unger, Katherine Smythe, Jennifer Rennix, Adam Fulbright, Theresa Lavon, Kitty Hawke, Lenore Overland, Patrick Overland, Frank Fulton, Kevin Arnold, Etta Holmes, Dana Sheehan, Justin Mead, James Crenshaw, Lily Thompson

Anyone there? Anyone online?

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

I am here. Is it over? I did not think there was anyone left. My name is Frank Fulton. I am the master gardener of the Overland estate, trapped inside a panic room.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Are there any survivors with you, Frank?

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

There are none. I am sorry to report it, but Patrick Overland is dead.

It was a terrible tragedy, so help me God. Please, I will soon perish here without help, but his death is not my doing.

The plague swept through the city, this much you know. Before this, there had been trouble at the Overland estate. Friction had sprung up between old man Overland and his young trophy wife, Lenore. She was a pretty young thing, and I suppose that was half the problem. How does an old man marry

a slip of a girl, and expect she will be satisfied with a quiet life?

I know because I cut flowers for her every morning. She had a preference for peonies and roses. These are the sort of things a gardener must know to please his employers. I served Mrs. Overland to the best of my abilities, but during the summer of '10, she disappeared.

There was a furor in the estate. Some believed she ran away, and that became the prevailing assumption -- she was so young, after all. All this soon died down, and was forgotten in the face of the plague raging in the neighboring town. People were scared, and blockades had been thrown up. I spoke to Mr. Overland directly, and he was unresponsive to my concerns.

I may not have a master's degree in psychology, as Mr. Overland does, but I am no fool; and I had known for the last year in his employment that he had a panic room.

As the plague began to make itself known, and the local authorities were not able to dispose of the mounting bodies fast enough to hide the presence of the pestilence, someone set fire to a house. The fireman were dead; no one responded. The conflagration raged right on into the next house, and the one after that, exploding gas lines and oil tanks.

I confronted Mr. Overland about the panic room, expecting that he would lead the way and we might sustain ourselves there until the danger had passed. Instead, he lost his mind, demanding to know what I knew of the panic room.

Mr. Overland was fevered, and his hands shook -- he had the plague. I suggested we take cover in the panic room, and he refused. Believing that he was out of his mind from the fever, I dragged him to the door, buried within an old root cellar.

When I attempted to gain entrance, he brandished a firearm. I had two choices -- stay and die, or close myself within the panic room, leaving Mr. Overland to his fate.

I chose the latter.

I expected Mr. Overland to succumb to the fever. He spent several hours at

the door, begging to be let in, where was Lenore! He demanded to be let in to see his wife. His ramblings intensified, became delusional. At one point, he had convinced himself that Lenore was inside with me, and that we were carrying on an extramarital affair, talking about him behind his back. He begged to see her one last time, that he might have the honor of confronting her adultery. At the last, he barricaded the door on the other side, fastening it shut.

After a time, he became silent. When I thought he had perished, there was a gunshot; and then, nothing more.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

We are sorry to hear this news. Rest assured, you are not the only one carrying the heavy burden of plague victims upon you. Many became delusional toward the end, throwing away their personal safety to chase after self-created demons.

We have many more questions for you. We've begun to generate power to bring back parts of the grid. As you can see, we have servers up and running.

We will not lie to you, Mr. Fulton; this situation is grim. There are bodies in the streets, where they expired in their cars, walking on their way to work. In nine months since the plague ravaged our streets, we are few. We fear there will still be minor outbreaks of this super plague that has swept through the nation, claiming the majority.

The plague is not our greatest fear, however. We have survived the worst and are nothing, if not persistent. Our people are combing the streets for supplies to help see ourselves through the next winter.

But we did not bring the electric back up because we enjoy light, or because we miss our prime time television -- we're rather sick of reality, wouldn't you agree? No, Frank Fulton, we need your help.

We need seeds.

We have no seeds. Without the ability to grow our own food, all of our weaponry is useless. We cannot eat our bullets, they make a poor meal. Even

our minor feat of electricity pales in comparison to the honest labor of a farmer's work. Our greatest cities have been reduced to nothing. No more grocery stores, fancy restaurants. Food is a problem that can only be remedied by the ability to replicate plants, whose fruit has the power to sustain us. Our canned goods are running out, and in a year's time, we face starvation.

Until we can secure our future with seeds, we are slowly dying. Mr. Fulton, please, tell us -- are you in possession of seeds?

Our future depends upon it.

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

Seems you have struck lucky.

My military background has always put me in the survivalist mind set. So, as insurance, I kept what's called a 'seed bank.' Seed banks are set aside for emergency agriculture on an acre of land.

I made my own personal seed bank. Not only did I collect seeds from corn, tomatoes, peppers, squash, I maintained seeds for roses, zinnias, nasturtium, morning glory, foxglove, lavender -- so many more. I kept seeds from plants that I thought would be useful, and those whose only purpose is their beauty and amusement.

There is only one problem -- I must find it.

I believe Mr. Overland hid the seed bank inside the panic room. It was to him that I gave over the seed bank for safe-keeping, and have not seen it since.

I begin the search now, and will email you with my findings.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Good luck! We all depend upon you now, Frank.

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

I have not located the seed bank. I am starving. There were only a few canned goods hidden away behind a false plank in the panic room, and I am facing dire circumstances.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

We are making efforts to clear the city, and open the roads that lead to your town. We are heading an expedition to find you and escort you, with the seed bank, from the Overland panic room.

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

I have torn this place apart from top to bottom. And there is nothing.

Where could the old man have put it?

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

Dear God. I found her. I found Lenore.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Another survivor, Frank?

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

She's dead. She's been here in the back room all this time. The bastard knew. He had to have known. He was so desperate to make sure I didn't get in here.

I didn't know her very well. She liked her roses, and I cut the orange and the yellow ones for her. She was always so sad, and gorgeous in the way silent film screen stars are gorgeous, like moving statues. Beautiful, but quiet; she

never looked happy.

I have to keep looking for the seed bank. But I need time to think. I'm so hungry, I'm trying to make what little food I have last. I don't know how to deal with this.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Stay safe, Frank. The world is depending on you.

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

I'm sorry it took so long to respond.

I've been trying to make plans to get rid of her body. I am overwhelmed with a sorrow I can't express. Alone with her body in this panic room, there is a growing sense of "otherness," a lingering presence that demands explanation. She appears to have died of starvation -- haunting reminder of a fate I too, might succumb to, and sooner than I think.

I find myself reminded of Iraq. Her prone body, her twisted shape -- was she in pain at the end?

I sat by her corpse a long time. I opened up a bottle of whiskey Overland stowed away, and poured some over her, as though she were a fallen comrade. Strong scotch poured over wrinkled, decaying skin. Her body didn't even smell anymore, proof that she has been in this vault since she went missing. It does not seem fair. I find it hard to care about the seed bank, which I still have not found, when Lenore Overland lays in an old storage room like discarded trash.

I pulled her out and put her on one of the spare cots, covered her with a sheet. I hope she finds peace. God help me, I hope I will.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

We're coming for you, Frank. Our people are clearing the roads, and there

are strings of hostiles here and there, holding us up, but we are on our way. Hang in there, Frank. Don't give up.

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Are you there, Frank? We have not heard from you in two weeks.

From: GardenerFulton

To: GreekKorus

things have changed.

they are my children our children. you cannot have our children

From: GreekKorus

To: GardenerFulton

Are there more survivors, Frank? Have you found the seed bank?

Frank? Are you there?

From: GreekKorus

To: New FEMA; Reconstructed Red Cross; Emergency Minute Men; Acting President of the New Republic of the United States of America

We have penetrated the Overland Panic Room in the hopes of rescuing Mr. Frank Fulton and the seed bank therein. In his final hours he succumbed to a variety of hallucinations due to ketosis, extreme starvation. We cannot express our deep sorrow that we could not come in time. We feared the worst, knowing that Frank had been unable to locate the seed bank.

However, what greeted us at our arrival was unexpected.

We pried open the door of the panic room and were confronted with a jungle of plants. Vines stretched from floor to ceiling bearing gorgeous blossoms, tomato plants in full bloom, fragrant herbs of lavender and mint, struggling seedlings crowding out others for light. Astonished, we fell back before the

onslaught of vegetation seeking to escape the room. Thick and lush, we were forced to regroup and reconsider our efforts.

Frank Fulton did not survive; his garden did. We are in the process of transplanting, beginning our great agricultural heritage -- one that defines our ability to succeed as a civilization. The ability to feed ourselves cannot be overrated. Weaponry alone is not enough. Frank Fulton can easily be credited with saving our lives, and what remains of our world. In remembrance, we will know this as Fulton's Garden.

From what we have been able to learn during the course of transplanting, all vegetation originates with the corpse of Lenore Overland. Her final letter illuminates the strange circumstances that has led to Fulton's Garden.

Husband,

By the time you read this, I will be dead.

What a sad, pathetic caricature of a love story we have become. I married you a year ago, but it feels like a hundred; and this panic room, a testament to the strength of our love, has become my tomb.

I hear Mr. Fulton on the ground level, moving about with his tools. Is he planting the rose beds this year, as spring moves in? The flowers bloom, with little thought to the drama going on in the ground beneath them.

Any shred of love I once had for you, Patrick Overland, is as dead as the dirt I find myself buried in. Bravo, Mr. Overland -- even a mausoleum could not be so cold, so impersonal, as a panic room when there is no panic, a locked vault with an occupant of one: your

slowly dying wife.

How I wish Mr. Fulton would hear me through his roses, his violets, his ever-blooming sun flowers. As though my voice might channel through the roots, and spring from the petals, blossoms and thorns, pricking him, awaken him to my plight. I had thought to protect your sense of dignity and honor through a quiet divorce, and we could go our separate ways.

I did not intend to fall in love with Mr. Fulton. It is a flaw in myself, that I find such attraction to wounded men, and he is a man with many wounds. He will not talk about the war. What does it take a man to walk out from a desert and into our garden? How does one let go of a gun, to pick up the spade, the trowel -- to cut roses for my vases every morning?

Something in that gentle nature, twisted to such ends, entranced me, Mr. Overland. Can you hold it against me, that my heart beat faster in the moments he handed me my arrangements in the dewy morning, his eyes downcast, a mutter of acknowledgment, the terror of touch and kindness?

Mr. Overland, we married because we thought it was love; I was a child, and you, an older man. Well, I have seen the world now, Mr. Overland, and you are not it, you are not the center of it. For what it is worth, I have never betrayed you, or told Mr. Fulton how deeply I feel for him, never given a clue to my secret nature, my yearnings, the nights I paused before his

door in the old servant's quarters, daring myself to knock.

How I wanted to confess all! And for love, for respect of my husband, I scattered the ashes of my desire, I tempered the burning; I have always been faithful to you. Now, Mr. Fulton putters in the garden above me, among the topiary and the bushes, laying down mulch for the season and turning over the beds. My death will be nothing compared to the death I suffer internally: I never told Mr. Fulton I loved him. And, now I never will.

I have been starving for weeks, after the canned supplies ran out. I have grown weak, and do not have much time left, as it is hard even to type this message on the computer you have left here on the back-up generator for emergencies.

The only thing I have left to eat now is the seed bank Mr. Fulton gathered. I pray there will be nourishment within. Hope springs eternal, husband.

Your faithful wife,

Mrs. Lenore Overland

END TRANSMISSION