

EMMIT AND THE MYSTERIOUS THINGS HE SAW

IT WAS THE DEAD OF NIGHT UPON ONE BRISK SATURDAY EVENING WHEN EMMIT MONTGOMERY WAS JUST ABOUT TO WALK HOME AND BEGIN HIS WORK THAT NEEDED TO BE FINISHED FOR THE NEXT DAY, WHEN HE SUDDENLY HEARD A STRANGE NOISE AND TERRIFIED SHOUTS COMING FROM DOWN THE STREET. LOOKING UP FROM HIS BRIEFCASE, WHICH HE HAD JUST SET ON THE ROCKY GROUND, EMMIT TURNED TO SEE WHAT ALL OF THE COMMOTION WAS ABOUT. HE WAS SHOCKED TO SEE A MASKED MAN WITH SOME SORT OF ODD DEVICE RUSH OUT FROM THE NEARBY CONVENIENCE STORE WITH SOME BROWN PAPER PARCELS HELD IN HIS ARMS.

"STOP HIM!" A WOMAN CALLED OUT AS THE CRIMINAL FLED THE SCENE OF HIS CRIME. AS THE ROBBER RAN TOWARDS HIM, AND HE STOPPED TO BAR THE CRIMINAL'S WAY, THE MAN TOOK THE STRANGE DEVICE AND POINTED IT AT EMMIT'S CHEST. UNSURE OF WHAT THE MAN INTENDED WITH THE OBVIOUS WEAPON, EMMIT WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAP OUT OF HIS PATH WHEN A BRILLIANT AND BLINDING BLUE LIGHT EMERGED FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE MACHINE'S LITTLE EYE AND EVERYTHING WENT WHITE.

HE CAME TO WHAT SEEMED LIKE MOMENTS LATER, AND THE STRANGEST SIGHT AWAITED HIM. HE SAW HIMSELF STOOPING OVER HIS BRIEFCASE AND LOOKED AROUND FOR THE MAN. WHEN THE ROBBER DID NOT READILY APPEAR, EMMIT ASSUMED THAT HE WAS DREAMING AS AN AFTEREFFECT FROM EITHER THE MYSTERIOUS TOOL THAT HAD KNOCKED HIM OUT, OR BECAUSE OF THE BLOW HE HAD SUSTAINED FROM IT. SUDDENLY, HE HEARD THE SURPRISED SHOUT OF THE WOMAN'S VOICE ONCE MORE.

"STOP HIM!" IT CALLED OUT AS HE THIS TIME LOOKED TOWARDS WHERE HE KNEW THE ROBBER WOULD BE COMING FROM. RIGHT ON CUE, THE THIEF EMERGED FROM THE STORE WITH HIS MACHINE AND THE BROWN PAPER PARCELS, AND HUSTLED TOWARDS EMMIT'S DREAM SELF. AS HE WATCHED WITH A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, EMMIT OBSERVED HIS SURPRISE AND THE CRIMINAL'S READINESS WITH EQUAL AWE AND HORROR. HIS DREAM SELF READIED FOR A BLOCK SUCH AS HE HAD DONE SO IN HIS HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL DAYS AS A FULLBACK AND LINEMAN. THE THIEF DREW NEARER STILL AND IT WAS ALL HE COULD DO NOT TO CRINGE AT THE THOUGHT OF THE INEVITABLE BLOW TO COME.

ONCE AGAIN, HE SAW THE THIEF SWITCH HANDS AND DRAW FORTH HIS ELEGANT YET STUNNING "DISABLER". EMMIT WATCHED AS THE MASKED MAN'S CREATION SPAT FORTH THAT BLINDING BLUE LIGHT ONCE MORE AND CRINGED AS THE BOLT STRUCK HIS DOPPLEGANGER SENSELESS ONCE MORE. TO BOTH HIS SHOCK AND DISMAY, SO TOO DID IT STRIKE HIM SENSELESS, FOR THERE WAS A SUDDEN BURST OF LIGHT THAT FILLED HIS VISION TOO AND THEN HE FELL INTO OBLIVION ONCE MORE...

AGAIN, EMMIT MONTGOMERY FOUND HIMSELF AWAKENED WITHIN MOMENTS OF BEING STRUCK DOWN. HIS EARS STILL RANG WITH AN ACHING THAT HE COULD ONLY ATTRIBUTE TO THE AFTERSHOCK OF THE CONTRAPTION WITH WHICH THE ODD MANHAD FELLED HIM. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD AND LOOKED UP TO SEE-TO GREAT SURPRISE, THAT HE NOW HAD A NEW VANTAGE POINT UPON THE CRIME AND HIS REPEATED ENCOUNTERS WITH THE "TIME STEALING" BANDIT.

HE SIGHED WEARILY AS HIS ORDEAL BEGAN TO REPEAT ITSELF, AND HE BEGAN TO CONTEMPLATE THE LOGIC OF THESE EVENTS WHICH HAD TRANSPIRED AS HE NOW OBSERVED HIS SURROUNDINGS INSTEAD OF HIMSELF. WITH A START, HE LOOKED FIRST DOWN AT HIS HANDS- AND REALIZED WITH A START THAT THEY WERE BLACK. NOR WAS THIS THE BLACK OF SOOT UPON A COALWORKER'S HANDS, BUT THE DEEP BROWN OF AN AFRICAN'S. "HOW COULD I POSSIBLY BE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S BODY AS WELL?" HE PONDERED AS HE NOW GLANCED AROUND AT HIS SURROUNDINGS ONCE MORE.

HE WAS ALONG THE OPPOSITE STREET THAN HE WAS WHEN HE HAD FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE THIEF, WHOM IT NOW SEEMED COULD STEAL BODIES AND TRANSPLANT THEIR INHABITANTS AS WELL. HE TURNED BACK TO WHERE HE NOW SAW HIMSELF ABOUT TO STAND AND SET HIS BLOCK FOR THE ONCOMING CRIMINAL. "I WONDER IF THE NEXT INCARNATION OF MY VIEWPOINT WILL POSSESS A WATCH..." HE THOUGHT AS HE BEGAN TO FORMULATE AN IDEA FOR STOPPING THE TIME AND BODY STEALING THIEF AND SETTING THINGS RIGHT ONCE MORE.

AS HE COUNTED DOWN THE LAST FEW SECONDS BEFORE THE IMPACT OF THE PALE BLUE LIGHT TOOK HIM, EMMIT NOTED THAT HE COULD NOW SEE THE FAINT OUTLINE OF SOME OBJECT ON THE HORIZON OF HIS VISION BEFORE HE WAS KNOCKED SENSELESS. COULD IT HAVE BEEN THE MYSTERIOUS OBJECT WITH WHICH THE BANDIT COULD OBVIOUSLY FORCE OTHERS TO REPEAT MOMENTS OF THEIR LIVES WITH?

HE NOW AWOKE EVEN SOONER THAN BEFORE, AND- IGNORING THE NOW CUSTOMARY ACHING OF HIS HEAD AND SPLITTING EARS, HE LOOKED DOWN TOO SEE IF HIS NEXT HOST POSSESSED A WATCH OR TIMEPIECE. HE WAS IN LUCK! THIS BODY DID INDEED HAVE A BROWN LEATHER WATCH UPON ITS LEFT HAND, AND HE REACHED DOWN TO NOTE THE TIME AS HE TURNED TO LOOK BACK AT THE ROBBER AND HIMSELF.

ESTIMATING THAT IT HAD TAKEN HIM ROUGHLY SEVEN SECONDS TO NOTE THE POSSESSION OF A WATCH, EMMIT CONTINUED COUNTING FROM THEN ON AS HE CHECKED THE CRIMINAL'S PROGRESS. THIS WOULD HELP HIM TO STOP THE CRIMINAL AT THE CRITICAL MOMENT

BEFORE HIS STRANGE DEVICE COULD SPIT ITS STUNNING BLUE RAY TOWARDS HIM AND RENDER HIM UNCONSCIOUS FOR A FEW MORE PRECIOUS SECONDS. AFTER ALL, THERE COULD ONLY BE A FINITE NUMBER OF PEOPLE PRESENT AT THE TIME OF THE ROBBERY AND HE HAD ALREADY BEEN THROUGH THREE.

HIS TIMEPIECE REACHED THE NEXT MINUTE AND NOW THE MASKED MAN STOOD FORTY FEET FROM HIS DREAM SELF. HE COUNTED DOWN THE SECONDS AS HE CAME CLOSER STILL. ONE MINUTE FORTY-ONE, ONE MINUTE FORTY-TWO, AND ETCETERA. HE SAW THE BRILLIANT FLASH AND HURRIEDLY GLANCED DOWN AT THE WATCH BEFORE HE COULD DEPART. "ONE MINUTE AND FIFTY-SEVEN SECONDS." HE SAID BEFORE HE ABRUPTLY FELL INTO THE PIT ONCE MORE. THIS TIME, HE WAS ALMOST POSITIVE THAT THE OBJECT HE KEPT SEEING WAS IN FACT THE SAME THAT THE THIEF WAS REPEATEDLY FELLING HIM WITH, AND ALLOWED HIMSELF THAT SMALL SATISFACTION.

"PERHAPS AS I CONTINUE THROUGH THE BYSTANDERS HERE, AND THE AFTERIMAGE OF THE STRANGE DEVICE WHICH STARTED THESE CHAIN OF EVENTS OFF BECOMES CLEARER, I WILL BE ABLE TO CHART MY PROGRESS TOWARDS HOPEFULLY REENTERING MY OWN BODY AND MY INEVITABLE SHOWDOWN WITH THE ROBBER. THIS IS TURNING INTO A PERSONAL BATTLE WITH ANOTHER HALF, AND IT SEEMS THAT THUS FAR, IT IS WINNING INDEED..."

HE BROKE OUT OF HIS THOUGHTS AND GLANCED UP FROM HIS REVERY. HE WAS NOW THE FARTHEST YET FROM THE CRIME AND SUBSEQUENT SUPERNATURAL MUGGING, AND COULD ONLY ASSUME THAT FROM NOW ON HE COULD ONLY GET CLOSER TO THE EVENTS. "PERHAPS THEN I CAN INTERFERE WITH THE EVENTS OF MY MUGGING AS ANOTHER PERSON IN ORDER TO CHANGE THINGS FOR MYSELF... BUT THEN AGAIN, THAT DOES BRING UP THOUGHTS UPON WHETHER OR NOT I WILL BE TRAPPED IN THIS BODY, SIMPLY MOVE ON TO THE NEXT PHYSICAL APPARATION, OR SIMPLY CEASE TO EXIST HAVING CHANGED HISTORY AND CREATED SOME FORM OF PARADOX OR ANOTHER..." HE THOUGHT MORE ABOUT IT AS HE SAW THE CRIMINAL EMERGE FROM THE STORE AND LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE CHOOSING THE RIGHT-HAND PATH AND HEADING TOWARDS EMMIT'S DREAM SELF.

IT WAS ALMOST AS IF HE HAD PURPOSELY CHOSEN TO HEAD THAT WAY, AND THAT HE HAD KNOWN WHAT WOULD TRANSPIRE AFTERWARDS AS WELL... "AN INTERESTING THOUGHT..." EMMIT MURMURED AS HE TOOK NOTE THAT HE ONLY HAD TWENTY-ONE SECONDS REMAINING BEFORE THE NEXT "JUMP" TOOK PLACE. "PERHAPS I WILL TAKE MY CHANCES WITH TRYING TO BREAK THINGS UP BEFORE THEY CAN GET OUT OF HAND AGAIN, AND MAYBE I WILL BE CLOSER AS WELL- GIVING ME PLENTY OF TIME TO DO SO..." HE OBSERVED AS THE ROBBER REACHED HIS DOPPLEGANGER FOR THE FOURTH TIME.

EMMIT AWOKE FOR THE FIFTH TIME WITH THE WORST HEADACHE YET AND TO THE SHOCK OF HEARING A MYSTERIOUS BEATING NOISE IN THE BACKGROUND. IT SEEMED AS IF SOME GIANT HEARTBEAT WERE REVERBERATING AMONG THE SHOPSTREETFRONTS LIKE A DEMENTED TICKER, AND AS IF SOME GREAT BEING CONTROLLED IT- SENDING IT OFF MERELY TO AGGRAVATE EMMIT IN HIS ATTEMPTS TO RETURN TO HIS OWN BODY. THE RHYTHMS CONTINUED AS HE MADE HIS DECISION AND STARTED TO RUN TOWARDS WHERE HE KNEW THE TIME BENDING CRIMINAL WOULD APPEAR MOMENTARILY.

HE COUNTED DOWN THE SECONDS UNTIL THE CRIMINAL APPEARED. ALTHOUGH EVERYBODY SEEMED OBLIVIOUS TO EMMIT'S APPEARANCE, THE CRIMINAL GLANCED HIS WAY BEFORE CONTINUING THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION TOWARDS HIS DREAM SELF. "SO, THAT'S WHY HE LOOKED THE OTHER DIRECTION BEFORE HEADING MY WAY AGAIN- I SIMPLY COULDN'T SEE IT AS ANOTHER INCARNATION."

HE CONTINUED HIS MAD RUSH TOWARDS THE CRIMINAL, AND WITH TWENTY-FOUR SECONDS LEFT ON HIS MENTAL CLOCK, SOMETHING ODD HAPPENED. SUDDENLY, IT WAS AS IF HE HAD RUSHED HEADLONG INTO A WALL, FOR AN INVISIBLE BARRIER IMPEDED HIS PROGRESS AND IT WAS ALL HE COULD DO NOT TO FALL TO THE GROUND IN PAIN. "GAH!" HE HAD SOMEHOW BEEN THWARTED ONCE MORE, WHEN HE WAS SO SURE THAT HE COULD CAPTURE THE CRIMINAL BEFORE ANY FURTHER APPARITIONS WERE NEEDED. IT LOOKED LIKE HE WOULD SIMPLY HAVE TO WAIT BEFORE HE COULD STOP HIM, AND THAT THE FINAL SHOWDOWN WOULD BE FIERCE INDEED...

WAS IT SIMPLY A MENTAL JINX OF THE CRIMINAL'S THAT HAD HINDERED HIS PROGRESS, OR WAS IT HIS INABILITY TO STOP SOMETHING FROM HAPPENING THAT WOULD PRODUCE PARADOX OR REWRITE HISTORY? ONLY TIME COULD TELL, AND- ALTHOUGH THIS SEEMED TO BE A TIME TRIAL IN ITS MOST PURE FORM, TIME WAS SOMETHING THAT HE HAD A LOT OF AT THE MOMENT...

HE WAITED SULLENLY AS THE SECONDS REACHED ZERO, AND THEN BEGAN TO FORMULATE A NEW PLOT AS SOON AS HE AWOKE AFTER HIS BRIEF KNOCKOUT PERIOD. IT SEEMED AS IF THOSE WERE GROWING SHORTER AS WELL- A SURE SIGN THAT HE WAS NEARING THE END OF THE ROAD. HOW MANY INCARCERATIONS SUCH AS THIS COULD HE HAVE LEFT TO HIM NOW? SIX? SEVEN? EIGHT AT MOST? ALTHOUGH IT SEEMED AS IF THESE THINGS WOULD NEVER END, HE KNEW SOMEWHERE IN HIS HEART THAT IT WOULD NEVER RESTART AND THAT IF HE DID NOT BEST THE THIEF IN HIS FINAL GAMBIT, THEN HE WOULD TRULY BE LOST FOREVER. HE HESITANTLY TOOK A FEW STEPS CLOSER. HE WAS NOW STANDING RIGHT OUTSIDE THE STORE.

HE SAW THE THIEF EMERGE AND LOOK FOR WHAT HE NOW KNEW WAS ANOTHER REPRESENTATION OF HIMSELF BEFORE TURNING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION TO RUN. HE STARTED OFF BEHIND HIM

WHEN SUDDENLY SOMETHING SLAMMED INTO HIS BACK. SURPRISED, HE TURNED TO SEE WHAT IT WAS THAT HAD HIT HIM, BUT THERE WAS NOT A SINGLE THING IN SIGHT THAT COULD HAVE DONE IT. QUICKLY PUTTING TOGETHER WHAT HAD HAPPENED, HE TURNED JUST AS THE THIEF LAYED HIS HANDS UPON HIS DREAM SELF AND FLIPPED HIM OUT OF HIS WAY BEFORE CONTINUING ON. "WHAT?!" HE CRIED IN SURPRISE AS THINGS BEGAN TO DEVIATE FROM WHAT HAD ORIGINALLY OCCURRED. HE QUICKLY PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER ONCE MORE HOWEVER BY ESTABLISHING THAT ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN TWO OF HIS MANIFESTATIONS COULD OBVIOUSLY CHANGE THE PREVIOUS HISTORY. AND HE HAD RUN INTO ONE OF THEM, SINCE HE COULD NOT SEE THEM WITHOUT THE AID OF SEEING WHERE THE CRIMINAL WALKED AND WHAT SPOTS HE AVOIDED FOR SEEMINGLY NO REASON.

HE WHIRLED OFF AFTER THE MASKED MAN AS HE WONDERED HOW MUCH TIME WAS NOW LEFT TO HIM IN THIS INCARNATION, AND HOW HE WOULD FIND HIS WAY OUT OF THIS NEW SITUATION. "PERHAPS NOW MY "CHANCES" HAVE RESET THEMSELVES AND I HAVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO ESCAPE?" HE THOUGHT AS HE CONTINUED AT BREAKNECK PACE. SOMEHOW THAT DIDN'T SEEM VERY LIKELY TO HIM CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT THINGS HADN'T BEEN EXACTLY WHAT YOU WOULD DEEM "FAIR" THUS FAR, BUT THEN AGAIN, STRANGER THINGS HAD ALREADY HAPPENED...

THE MASTERFUL THIEF RUSHED SUDDENLY INTO A DIVERGING ALLEYWAY, AND AS EMMIT'S MARK WENT DOWN TO ZERO AND HE AWAITED THE NOW COMMONPLACE RESETTING, HE WAS HAPPILY SHOCKED WHEN NO SUCH DEFAULT WAS APPLIED AND HE STILL FOUND HIMSELF CHASING AFTER THE CULPRIT. "THANK GOODNESS FOR THAT FACT." HE HUFFED OUT AS HE DARTED INTO ANOTHER NARROW ALLEYWAY IN PURSUIT OF HIS 'DAY-RUINER'?

"THERE'S NO ESCAPE FOR YOU!" HE SHOUTED AFTER THE FLEEING SHADOW OF THE MAN WHO HAD CAUSED HIM SO MUCH TROUBLE IN SUCH A SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME. "I WILL NEVER GIVE UP!" HE SAID AS HE SUDDENLY LURCHED INTO A PILE OF BOXES THAT THE SUPERNATURAL CRIMINAL HAD SMASHED INTO HIS WAY. PAINFULLY GLANCING OFF HIS KNEES, THE BOXES HAD OTHERWISE NO EFFECT ON EMMIT'S PROGRESS, AND HE BEGAN TO FEEL INVINCIBLE AS HE CONTINUED TO CHASE THE HARRIED THIEF LIKE A HOUND WILL AFTER A RABBIT OR A HARE.

SUDDENLY, SENSING SOMETHING FISHY WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, EMMIT SLID TO A STOP AS THE THIEF WHIRLED AND PULLED OUT A KNIFE. SURPRISED, EMMIT CALLED, "WHAT? YOUR DEVICE NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU NOW? GETTING A BIT TIRED OR ME CHASING AFTER YOU? WELL MAYBE YOU SHOULDA THOUGHT OF THAT BEFORE YOU USED IT ON ME AND TRAPPED ME IN THIS GODFORSAKEN CONUNDRUM OF EVENTS!"

ALTHOUGH HE HAD EXPECTED SOME RESPONSE, THE ONE THAT HE RECEIVED WAS NOT QUITE THE ONE HE HAD THOUGHT OF. THE THIEF RIPPED OFF HIS MASK TO REVEAL- NOTHING. HE HAD NO FACE WHATSOEVER, SIMPLY AN EMPTY BLACK HOLE WHERE ONE USUALLY RESIDES. HOWEVER, IF THIS PUZZLED EMMIT, THEN THE NEXT THING THAT HAPPENED COULD NOT HAVE HELPED IN ANY WAY...

"HELLO HENRY." THE THIEF SAID AS HE ADVANCED. EMMIT WAS STUNNED. "MY NAME'S NOT HENRY, YOU GODDAMNED FREAK!" HE SHOUTED AS THE KNIFE MAN CASUALLY STROLLED TOWARDS HIM, AND EMMIT COULD ONLY ASSUME THAT HE HAD MURDEROUS INTENT. IT TOOK HIM A MOMENT TO REALIZE HOWEVER, THAT APPARENTLY HENRY WAS THE NAME OF THE PERSON WHOSE BODY HE POSSESSED, AND APPARENTLY THE MAN COULDN'T SEE PAST THAT FACADE.

WAS HE NOW RELIVING SOMEONE ELSE'S MEMORIES OR LOST MOMENTS OF THEIR LIFE? COULD IT BE THAT, SINCE HE HAD BROKEN THE RULES OF THE MOD, SOME THINGS WERE NOW CHANGING? ALL OF THESE PECULIAR QUESTIONS WERE INTERESTING, AND YET NONE REPRESENTED ANY ANSWERS OR CLARIFICATION, AND INSTEAD MERELY ADDED TO THE PUZZLE.

"HENRY, I WARNED YOU ABOUT FOLLOWING ME TO MY WORKPLACE." THE FACELESS MAN SAID AS HE STEPPED NEARER STILL, THE KNIFE RAISED AS IF IN SALUTE. "WHAT DID I EVER TELL YOU WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU DID FOLLOW ME?" HE ASKED AS HE CAME CLOSER. "I BELIEVE I SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE CONSEQUENCES."

WITH A CRY, THE BIA DEMAN LUNGED AT HIM, AND HE TRIED TO SPIN OUT OF THE WAY, BUT HE WAS TOO LATE. HE FELT THE KNIFE FLASH THROUGH HIS FLANK, AND SUDDENLY, HE SAW A RED LIGHT BEFORE HIS EYES, BUT IT WAS UNLIKE ANY HE HAD EVER SEEN, AND NOT THE SAME AS THE BLUE ONE BEFORE IT. HE COULD ONLY ASSUME THAT THIS WAS THE NATURAL LIGHT OF PAIN, AND THAT IT WAS DUE TO THE BLADE NOW BEING WRENCHED FROM HIS LEFT SIDE AS HE TUMBLED WORDLESSLY TO THE HARD CEMENT GROUND. THROUGHOUT THIS ALTERCATION, THE MAN WAS UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SILENT, AND SOON EMMIT SAW WHY.

THERE WERE MANY BODIES HANGING FROM HOOKS HANGING FROM CHAINS EMBEDDED IN THE CEILING. EACH WAS PALE AND LACED MOST BLOOD. ALTHOUGH THEIR CLOTHING WAS COVERED IN IT. "SO... THIS, THIS IS YOUR OTHER WORK?" HE MANAGED TO GRUNT OUT AS HE FELT HIS LIFE SLIPPING SLOWLY FROM HIM, LIKE THE BLOOD FROM HIS WOUND. "THESE PEOPLE- WHO WERE THEY, AND WHAT MADE YOU DO THIS TO THEM?" HE ASKED AS THE MAN TURNED AROUND, APPARENTLY DISAPPOINTED THAT HE COULD STILL SPEAK.

INSTEAD, HE CAME NEAR ONCE MORE AND WHISPERED INTO EMMIT'S EAR, "GOOD, GOOD... I ALWAYS DID LIKE TO PLAY BEFORE YOU DIED... WANT TO START A GAME?" HE SAID. WITHOUT WAITING FOR EMMIT'S RESPONSE, HE BEGAN.

"WHAT'S SAY YOU TO A CHALLENGE OF WITS?" HE ASKED AND THEN WENT ON BEFORE HE COULD ANSWER ONCE MORE. "A RIDDLE."

WHAT HAS ABL DE IS AS SHARP AS A SHIP SKIMMING THROUGH WATER AND A BITE AS COLD AS ICE?" THE FACELESS ONE PRONOUNCED. EMMIT THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A SECOND AS THE ANSWER IMMEDIATELY LOOMED CLEARLY TO HIM. "A KNIFE?" HE REPLIED AS THE MAN CACKLED GLEEFULLY AND SAID, "CORRECT!" "AND NOW, FOR YOUR REWARD..."

SENSING WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN ONCE MORE, EMMIT TRIED TO SQUIRM AWAY, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. THE MAN STABBED DOWNWARD INTO HIS ABDOMEN WITH ANOTHER THRUST, AND HE FELT THE THING SLIDE ASILY THROUGH HIS INSIDES ONCE MORE AS HE SAW THE ROOM SPIN AND SWAY SICKENINGLY. "YOU STILL IN THERE HENRY?" THE MAN ASKED AS HE PULLED HIS HAIR UP IN ORDER TO LIFT HIS NECK UP TO WHERE HE COULD SEE HIM. "YOU ARE, REN'T YOU?" HE NODDED STIFFLY AND THEN CONTINUED ALONG ONCE MORE. "ANOTHER RIDDL* WHAT HAS A STIFF EDGE LIKE A BLOFF, AND YET IS FLEXIBLE AS AN ACROBAT?"

EMMIT CRIED OUT IN PAIN AS HE SAID THE ANSWER, ONLY HOPING THAT DEATH WOULD COME WITH THE NEXT INEVITABLE STRIKE. "A KNIFE DAMN YOU!" HE CRIED.

"NOW, NOW." THE CRIMINAL WITHOUT A FACE TUTTED. "WE MUSTN'T USE BAD LANGUAGE HENRY. YOU KNOW I'VE TOLD YOU THIS BEFORE. I WASN'T GOING TO HURT YOU, I TRUTHFULLY WASN'T, BUT NOW, YOU'VE BEEN A BAD BOY..." EMMIT TRIED TO WIGGLE AWAY ONCE MORE, BUT THE MAN'S HANDS WERE MUCH TOO FAST FOR HIM, AND AS THEY ROUGHLY GRABBED HIM, HE READIED HIMSELF FOR ANOTHER STRIKE. INSTEAD HE WAS HAULED ROUGHLY TO HIS FEET AND SET IN A CHAIR THAT HAD NOT BEEN THERE BEFORE.

"WHERE DID THAT?" HE BEGAN AS THE MAN CUT HIM OFF WITH A BRUTAL SLAP TO THE SIDE OF HIS HEAD. HE HIT THE GROUND AGAIN WITH SUCH FORCE THAT HE NEARLY VOMITTED. HOW SATISFYING IT WOULD BE IF HE DID INDEED HURL ON THE CRUEL TORTURER'S SHOES... THE MAN HAULED HIM UP ONCE MORE AND SAT HIM IN THE CHAIR AGAIN. NOW HE STARED AT HIM AND SAID, "YOU WOULD LIKE SOME ANSWERS, WOULDN'T YOU HENRY?" IGNORING THE FACT THAT HE HAD PREVIOUSLY CALLED HIM BY ANOTHER NAME, EMMIT NODDED SLOWLY. "OKAY THEN, WE'LL START WITH MY NAME." THE FACELESS AND NAMELESS ONE SAID CURTLY.

"MY NAME IS MR. STEIN." HE SAID. "HOWEVER, I THINK YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF ME BEFORE BY ANOTHER NAME..." EMMIT SHOOK HIS HEAD, AND MR. STEIN NODDED WHEN HE SAW THIS. "OF COURSE, MAYBE MY FACE WOULD HELP YOU TO REMEMBER..." HE SAID AS HE REACHED UP AND BEGAN TO PULL AT THE DARKNESS ENSHROUDING HIS LOOK OF A FACE, TUGGING AT IT LIKE IT WERE ANOTHER MASK HE WORE.

AS THE DARKNESS PULLED FREE AT LAST, WITHERING AWAY IN MR STEIN'S HANDS, EMMIT SAW WITH A START THAT THE FACE BEFORE HIM WAS IN FACT- HIS OWN. "WHAT THE HELL?" HE SHOUTED ANGRILY AS HE STRUGGLED TO RISE AND HURL HIMSELF AT THE MAN WHO WAS APPARENTLY HIMSELF IN HIS OTHER, TRUE BODY. "WHAT KIND OF SUPERNATURAL TRICKERY IS THIS?" HE QUESTIONED THE FAMILIAR FACE BEFORE HIM, WHICH NOW GRINNED SAVAGELY BACK AT HIM.

"OH, YOU WANT TO KNOW DO YOU? AFTER YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT ME ALL THOSE YEARS AGO? AFTER YOU LOCKED ME UP?" MR STEIN ANGRILY REPLIED AS HE STRODE NEAR AND EMMIT PREPARED HIMSELF FOR ANOTHER SLAP. "WELL, I WILL TELL YOU, BECAUSE IT WON'T MATTER ANYWAY." HE SAID AS HE BACKED AWAY AND PULLED UP YET ANOTHER CHAIR TO SIT DOWN UPON. "ALL THOSE YEARS AGO- FIFTEEN IN FACT, BACK IN THE WORLD WAR, REMEMBER THEM AS YOU SPENT HUNTING THOSE NAZIS?" HE BEGAN. "REMEMBER YOUR COMMENDATIONS AND ALL OF THE HONORS YOU RECEIVED FOR KILLING THOSE BASTARDS?"

"WELL, I DO SUPPOSE I REMEMBER THE WAR, IF NOT EXACTLY AS YOU DO..." HE ALLOWED HIMSELF TO SAY.

"WELL, THAT'S HOW IT WAS, I SHOULD KNOW. I'M THE ONE YOU CREATED ONCE THE WAR BEGAN. AND YOU COULDN'T BRING YOUR LITTLE PRETTYBOY SELF TO DO THE DIRTY WORK." HE SAID AS HE RANTED STILL. "ANYWAY, REMEMBER WHEN THEY DISCHARGED YOU FOR DECIMATING A VILLAGE OF WEST POLANDERS, AND YOU CLAIMED YOU DIDN'T DO IT- YET OTHERS SAID THEY HAD SEEN YOU? WELL, I BET YOU WONDERED WHY YOUR DEAREST FRIENDS HAD LIED ABOUT YOU..."

IT WAS ALL TRUE, EMMIT NOW KNEW WHY THINGS HAD GONE AS SOURLY AS THEY HAD BACK IN 1943 AND ALSO NOW KNEW WHO TO BLAME IT ALL ON AS WELL. HIMSELF, FIGURATIVELY- BUT THEN, IT WAS THE SAME AS IT WAS THEN AS WELL...

"I SEE THAT NOW YOU UNDERSTAND FULLY WHAT I'VE JUST TOLD YOU, HIS EVIL NATURE WHISPERED BACK TO HIM AS HE SAT THERE ERE GRINNING SMUGLY ACROSS THE WAY. NOW YOU KNOW WHY I AM HERE. I WANT OUT, SO I BROUGHT YOU IN. NOW YOU KNOW THE HELL I'VE HAD TO ENDURE WHILE YOU KEPT ME LOCKED UP HERE RELIVING THINGS OVER AND OVER FOR ETERNITY, OR AT LEAST FOR FIFTEEN YEARS..." HE SAID AS HE FLIPPED THE KNIFE OUT ONCE MORE AND INSPECTED IT CLOSELY.

"THEN WHO ARE ALL OF THESE OTHER PEOPLE HERE?" EMMIT ASKED AS HE GLANCED AROUND AND POINTED TOWARDS THE HANGING BODIES.

"THOSE?" MR STEIN ASKED. "OH, THOSE ARE JUST YOUR OTHER NATURES. I WAS ONE ABLE TO GET TO YOU AFTER I'D DESTROYED EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM FIRST... ISN'T IT AMAZING? YOU HAVE SO MANY ALTERNATE PERSONS EXISTING, AND YET YOU NEVER KNEW IT... AH O, GUESS WHAT THAT BLUE SHOT YOU SAW WAS?" HE ANXIOUSLY GLANCED AT A WATCH AS HE TURNED BACK FOR A REPE. "ANY THOUGHTS? NONE? WELL, THAT WAS MY HUMAN HOST ASSASSINATING YOU. I'VE SHOT YOUR MORTAL BODY AND THOSE PERSPECTIVES OF YOURS WERE MERELY ALTERNATE PERSONALITIES. NOW ALL THAT REMAINS IS YOUR MIND, AND THEN I AM FINALLY FREE!" HE ANNOUNCED CRAZILY AS HE CEASED HIS MONOLOGUE.

"WHAT NOTHING TO SAY? CAN YOU GET YOUR TONGUE?" HE SAID AS HE OBSERVED EMMIT SITTING SILENTLY, SLUMPED A BIT OVER IN HIS CHAIR. "OH, I GET IT, YOU'RE PLAYING DEAD WITH ME." HE SAID AS HE STOOD UP.

HE WALKED FORWARD AND SHOOK EMMIT BY THE SHOULDERS. HE DID NOT STIR. STARTING TO GET WORRIED THAT HIS PREY HAD ELUDED HIM AND DIED ALONE LEAVING HIM TRAPPED WITHIN THAT VESSEL FOR ETERNITY, HE SHOOK HIM ONCE MORE. "WAKE, DAMNIT!" MR STEIN GREW INCREASINGLY FURIOUS, AND DROVE AROUND THE ROOM, SMASHING THINGS AND HURLING OBJECTS AT THE WALL. HE HAD LEFT THE KNIFE ON THE GROUND.

HE DID NOT HEAR EMMIT'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING HIM UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE. "NO..." HE STARTED TO SAY AS HE TURNED AND THE KNIFE DESCENDED QUICKLY INTO HIS NECK. "NO!" HE SHOUTED AND THEN GURGLED OFF INTO SILENCE. EMMIT AND MR. STEIN COLLAPSED TO THE GROUND, BOTH DEAD, AS HE HAD USED HIS LAST RESERVE OF STRENGTH TO MAKE IT FROM THE CHAIR TO HIS DOPPELGÄNGER.

THUS, ALL WAS SILENT, AND THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE DARK WORLD COULD CONTINUE UNIMPEDED. FINALLY, THE STRIFE THAT THAT FOREIGNER HAD BROUGHT TO THEIR WORLD HAD CEASED, AND THEIR EVIL SOCIOPATHIC COMMUNITY MEMBER, MR. STEIN WAS NO MORE AS WELL. THINGS WERE LOOKING UP...