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Jonathan

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Jonathan

Time

"Hello, this is Elizabeth. May I help you?"

Sometimes, if you think about it long enough, it engulfs you and takes you closer to the edge. Some people, no matter how hard they try, cannot shake a bad feeling.

It weighs them down, plays with them, actually teases them. And no one else is living your life - they can not know - know one will ever no.

"Hello? Are you there? Hey, Phil, they aren't talking.

Hello? Please, I can help."

That is a scary thought, isn't it? No one will ever know. You are completely alone sometimes. If you never feel alone, I envy you. It is total helplessness, no matter how strong,, how intellectual, how. . . how anything at all. Escape is not possible. Certainly, at times, a little niche of security is found, but the walls of that fortress can not stand forever. The song won't last.

"Phil, get on the line. Trace the call. Please, listen to me very carefully. I. . ."

Let me describe it. I am walking alone. The night is chilly, there is a little bite to the wind. The situation did not improve at all today. You've talked about it, but that only made it worse. Talking about it is overrated anyway. So you start to think hat went wrong? Who is to blame?

". . . and that's what we are here for. To help. Talk with me. If you're feeling alone, I'm here for you. Please, give me a signal that I'm reaching you. I want. . ."

And thousands of reasons pop up. Thousands. But they are all so superficial. You think, how could that be a reason for what happened? But the search for a reason is hopeless. And that's the answer - there is no reason. It just happened. But knowing that only makes the situation worse. It means you never had control in the first place.

"We've got the call traced Elizabeth. I don't think its a prank. They would not have stayed on so long. Any luck yet?"

"No Phil. Nothing."

So where does that leave me. Near death, I suppose. I can not control my life - I've lost whatever control I've had. Some times I think I never had control.

So here is the situation. They do not enjoy it anymore, she did not enjoy it in the first place, and I never had any say in the matter. NEVER. So they played with my life. And they said they were sorry. Well, thanks. That helps. "I know that the hurt was not intentional, but why did it have to happen?"

"That's true, the hurt was not intentional. You've got to realize that. Talk with me. . . what is your name?"

"Jonathan." Just answer me one question - what did I do? Or maybe two - why was I not considered in the situation? Throw a little something substantial my way - whether its love or hate.

"Jonathan. Good."

What's so good about that?

"Jonathan, tell me your problem. I can help you."

I've been telling you my problems, you bitch. And just like everyone else, you don't understand.

"Phil, he's not responding.

"Well reach him, dammit. Give me the phone."

"Jonathan, what are you thinking. We can't guess. If I didn't want to help you I wouldn't be on the phone."

So now I have no choice.

"You have a choice, Jonathan. You. . ."

"But do i really" have a "choice?" What is your "name?"

"Phil. I'm Phil. I. . ."

Phil, you can't find me. Your existence will not coincide with mine - my existence is far removed from your security. Phil, "if only you knew of the independent existence I am experiencing, you would begin to understand." But you can not understand...

"But Jonathan. . ."

"I have an" actuality that would frighten the "shit" out of you "Phil." You don't want to know of the answer i've unearthed. I am the "lucky" one.

"Jonathon, I'm trying to reach you. Reach back."

"Phil, I am. And you don't understand how far the gulf between us has widened." Was there a chance of ever returning? Was there Phil? Phil? Phil?Phil Phil?

Phil, I'm leaving you now.

"Jonathon, someone will be there for you in two minutes. Hang on, Jonathon. Are you hanging on?"

In essence, Phil, you have already lost me. . .they have already lost me. Time is a useless measure when the future has already become the past and when the present, also, has already become the past. They co-exist, Phil. They are one entity.

"Elizabeth, I think we're all right. The guys are going to be there any second. Jonathon, you're doing great."

No choices, Phil.

"Jonathon? I. . ."

The matter is ended with my life.

Apocalypse

I sat on the picnic table, not eating, but being eaten. Earlier, when I descended the worn and worm-eaten wooden steps, my night vision had yet to take effect, and the immediate environment was a blurred mass of trees and foliage in various shades of dark and darker that would take on grotesque forms to a vivid imagination. I saw suspect shadows and movements within the brush that tugged at my mind and, though I made myself believe that I was truly alone, they coaxed me into remembering that society was near.

Then there was the trash can. God, the trash can. After I sat down, I glanced over my shoulder, only to see a witch dressed in the darkness, hunched over and meticulously inspecting the earth - for herbs and salamanders, no doubt. Periodically, I checked her progress, which was outrageously slow, and as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, the devil's hag took advantage of her amorphous qualities and turned herself into a garbage can. At least I then had one less problem to concern myself about. The witch made me uncomfortable.

There were many trees blocking my view of the road directly in front of me, but to my right I could see the winding pavement reach up and out of sight. I could also see the driveway where a car would exit, momentarily leave my line of vision, and then re-enter it at what was 90% of the time too fast for the sinuous, sharply angled road. And tonight it was raining - had been for maybe an hour. I'm not sure how long - I had only recently exited the false haven of the place I call home.

To my left and mostly out of sight there was a second road, this one winding upward. A Jeep Cherokee sped up the slight incline and stopped as the hill sloped gently into a small parking area. I watched the red taillights intently over my left shoulder, and I pictured the vehicle exploding violently and disturbing the peaceful night.

The red lights seemed to study me in hopes of discovering the whys of my actions. If I closed my left eye, and squinted with my right, the lights blurred and then became tiny pinpoints of electrified energy glaring at me, seeking to burn through my retinas and singe my fatigued cerebral cortex. The lights sought me through the blackness, filling the distance between us with a faintly discernable ray of pulsating heat - or hate. Then it was gone - vanished into the thick night, seeking another.

Hearing a disturbance in the brush, I tensed briefly as I sensed an unwanted presence. I turned and was frightened by the unexpected close proximity of an evergreen that was standing guard over the table. It was only a cat that had attracted my attention as it wandered through the undergrowth, searching for only it knew what. Maybe it would find death on the road tonight, as many creatures do. . .

I found myself staring up the road to the driveway. A car pulled up - was it time? I saw myself unfold my body and move, barefoot, through

the bushes and trees to the edge of the road. My movements were methodical, pointed, defined. Also, there was a shroud of dread and hopelessness outlining my body, and I was almost engulfed in pity for the wraith that was now standing by the roadside. The car turned out of the drive and began down the ever increasing slope. The ghost of me, continuing with the same systematic motion, walked into the road and into the lane in which the Honda Accord sedan was steadily approaching. Even if the Honda was not speeding, stopping would be impossible - there just would not be enough time. A split second and bam! - there's one road kill that will not be counted in the log of someone's journey. The wraith faded into the night as I was pulled out of my foreshadowing hallucination.

The rain came in spurts, but always droplets would fall from the trees, and occasionally a gust of wind would send gobbets of water cascading down onto the already moist earth, and onto the forlorn figure that sat with his arms wrapped around his knees, and his head bent down, balancing on his limbs that provided a natural resting place.

I awoke abruptly from a horrid dream of life at its ugliest. It was now 2:30. I took off my watch and placed it beside me on the chipped red paint of the table. I wondered how so many could believe that an instrument such as a watch - a simplistic representation of our existence - could capture the most elusive concept of the ages. Show me the past on a watch. Show me the future. Show me life.

My surroundings had become increasingly clearer, and I could see most of what was around me distinctly. I looked to my right and was again startled by the ominous evergreen that seemed to be haunting me (was it moving closer?).

I stretched and yawned. The bush in front of me stared curiously. I saw it burst into an inferno, though it was very green and very wet. I was unthreatened by the flames of this fire. I snapped out of the dream-state that I had once again floated into, and the beauty of the evening embraced me. My blood slowed in my veins, seemingly in an attempt to come into equilibrium with the tranquility of the darkness. I remembered that the light cool breeze was nature's breath and not my own, and I inhaled slowly. What immaculate confusion - briefly, I had been flowing freely with nature.

This is the way it should be - calm. My skin was cold and I shivered violently - had the Grim Reaper's fingers played on my neck? No, only the evergreen, reaching closer to me, striving to touch me, hoping to jolt me into action. It realized what was happening, and was tired of me being there. So was I.

My barefeet hit the mud, but I only lost my balance momentarily. I walked past the burning bush and down into the darkness created by the

cluster of trees that stood by the black roadway. Something strange about the bush held my attention fleetingly, I believe because within my brain a voice was screaming about the absurdity of the green and wet bush actually going up in smoke. I skirted several thorn bushes for no apparent reason, considering my intent. I walked deliberately, almost confidently, and reached the road in a matter of minutes. As if on schedule, a car stopped at the end of the driveway and preceded to take the left turn that led toward me. Later, she will think that she should have turned right. I stepped casually onto the asphalt and into the path of the oncoming VW Jetta. The seconds passed oh so slowly, and I remembered my watch on the picnic table. Glancing back into the trees from which I had come, I saw the cat silently stalking. It looked up at me - and if a cat's face could exude terror. . .

Frame by frame the last seconds of my life moved like the slide show of a disastrous family vacation. First the high beams of the car peeked around the bend, then the front half, and then the whole vehicle came into view.

I looked up in time to see a horror-stricken look dance an ancient tribal ritual of death on her attractive countenance. And then I realized that I regretted my decision. Too late - sometimes it is only too late. I should not have allowed someone to become a component of my apocalyptic decision. It may frighten them, that which they can not comprehend. But nothing is ever pure in this world. There is always that little blemish that so frustrates a perfectionist. This will be the smudge on my final action, the fact that i frightened this heroine of my death. But what could I do? Breath a sigh of relief? Yes. And smile a smile for that which was, and that which will be - not with, but without me.

Jim Cox