

Darkness

I was driving through the streets of New York in the middle of a freezing winter. The traffic lights a little further down the road were barely visible in the blizzard. The green light had just changed to orange and with no one in front of me, I pushed down the gas pedal. As I sped through the intersection I heard a loud claxon on my left. I saw the front of the truck just before it slammed into me.

I left the world that moment and awoke in darkness, the image of the truck the last thing in my mind. I stood up and looked around. I saw nothing but blackness and heard nothing but silence. I looked down and saw my hands and feet, though I couldn't discern any source of light. It seemed there was nothing there other than me until I heard a voice come from the darkness and a hooded figure approached me. He wore dark grey robes which revealed not a single patch of skin and his hood cast a dark shadow, as dark as the blackness around me, over his face. His voice was low and seemed to vibrate, but there was more than just his appearance and speech that gave me a funny feeling.

"You are dead. Speeding through the streets of New York got you killed."

"A truck. The last thing I remember is an image of a truck."

"Yes. And now you are dead."

"I can't be dead. This is just a dream. A nightmare. I'm not dead." I told myself. It calmed me, if only for a little while.

"You are dead. Just because you won't accept it doesn't change it. You are still dead."

I looked at him, puzzled.

"What? What is this? Where am I? Who are you then?"

"I told you that you are dead. This is where your afterlife begins, a small pocket of limbo I crafted specially for your soul."

"And you are....? Wait, this isn't right. Why am I talking to you? This is a dream. Nothing more. A lucid dream. It must be."

The hooded figure sighed.

"Very well. I will leave you here for a while. Time will teach you the truth."

He slowly faded away as shadows from the darkness swirled around him, leaving me behind. At first, I just waited until I woke up in my bed, but I didn't. After a while I began to wander around, intend on exploring the strange nightmare I found myself in. The more time passed, the more my exploration became an escape attempt. I started running in one direction, but all I found was more of the dark. The running became walking and eventually I stood still again. I turned around, looking for something in the dark, but still found nothing. I sat myself down on the blackness beneath me and waited for the dream to end. I didn't wake up. With nothing else to do, I was forced to recall my last moments. I began to remember more than just the image of a truck. I remembered driving through New York in winter and driving faster than I should just to get through an intersection before the traffic light went red. As I drove over the intersection a truck came from my left and smashed into my car. I do not know how much time passed before he came back, but by the time he did, I had let go of the illusion that I was dreaming. I was dead and my last memories confirmed it. That truck had crushed me. It was the only possibility.

"Have you accepted your fate?" He was back. I stood up, turned around and faced him, standing several yards away.

"The truck killed me."

"Indeed. I am glad to see you are willing to accept your passage into the next world fairly quickly. Other tend to be far more stubborn, clinging to their previous existence. That will serve us well."

“So, you’re Death then?” I asked, not paying attention to his last sentence.

There was a silence for a few seconds. I imagined he raised his eyebrow in the dark shadows the hood cast over his face, as if my assumption had been crazy or asinine.

“You mortals often prefer to turn back to the myths and legends you were told since birth. I find it to be a strange thing, that you would believe those stories to be true. But to answer your question, no, I am not Death. In fact, Death does not have any incarnation. Not in your realm and not in mine.”

“So what are you then? And there am I? Where will I go? What about heaven, hell, God?” The man sighed. He found my questions tiresome, as if he had heard and answered them a thousand times already.

“I see you were not listening before. This is a small pocket of reality which I created to capture and hold your soul for the time being. Planes of existence you would call heaven or hell or not your concern. Neither is the existence of deities. You are mine now.”

“Excuse me?”

“You will serve me. Your soul is mine. That’s why I captured you.”

“Serve you!? What the hell? I’m not your slave!”

The situation I had come to accept recently was already taking a turn for the worst. Things became much more grim from that point on.

“Rather than struggle, you should consider yourself lucky. I am not a harsh master. There are others who are far more cruel than I.”

“Bullshit! I don’t care who or what you are, but you will let me go right now!”

“You have no power here. You can not escape. Your only way out is to accept your fate and accept it you will. Everyone accepts in the end.”

I swung my fist at him, but I hit nothing. My hand simply went right through him and he just stood there, unharmed, unphased.

“Very well. I will leave you alone in this place again. It will not be long before you willingly pledge yourself to me. The darkness will teach you.”

“You have no right!” I yelled as he faded away, his figure again replaced by the darkness around me.

I started running again, but faster than before. This time, I ran as fast as I could and always in the same direction, just as before. And again, I encountered nothing but the darkness. I was trapped and although I knew it, I refused to simply give up. So I kept running for as long as I could be bothered. I must have run for a long time, but never did I feel any pain or fatigue.

Although I had arms and legs, they must have been no more than an illusion. It was the shape I had in life, the form I remembered and so my mind had given that form to my soul in my death. I found it strange I felt no pain and didn’t grow tired from the running, yet that I could still see and hear, since my material form had been obliterated and along with it so must have my eyes and ears. It was then I realized my perceptions had changed and that seeing, wasn’t really seeing anymore, that hearing, wasn’t really hearing anymore. It felt very different than from what I was used to in life. I kept running, still finding nothing. I don’t know for sure, but at least several hours must have passed before I stopped and stood still for the second time.

My mind had given up. After another long wait, my captor returned.

“You have no right.” I told him again.

“Are you ready to serve me now?” He asked, ignoring my statement. He simply didn’t care.

“What would you have me do?” I asked, much more compliant this time.

“There are a variety of tasks I will give you during your service. Sometimes I will send you back to the mortal realm to kill someone or drive them to suicide for me so that I may collect their soul as well. At other times I will simply send you on an errand to deliver a message or retrieve an object. There will also be times when I will use you against my competitors.”

“I won’t kill anyone for you.”

“You will, but if you are still not ready I will simply leave you behind again. Can you handle that again? For how long? Minutes, hours, days... years? Millenia? Without a sense of time? With the realization that I might just leave you here forever?”

It was silent again for a few seconds, though this time he waited for me to answer. My mind crumbled. There was no other choice.

“I will do as you ask.”

“Good. Now give me your soul so that I may bind it to me.”

“My soul is yours.”

“Excellent. Now, you are almost ready. But first I must teach you one more thing.”

“What is-“ A flood of emotions interrupted me. I felt anger, hatred and sadness all at once and far more intense than I had ever felt before. I could not speak because of it. My mind was overwhelmed. I fell on my knees and it stopped. I looked up at my captor.

“You are forever mine. I can do that and more to you whenever I want and wherever you might be. And when you are in the mortal realm, I can kill you whenever I want and wherever you might be, as well as inflict intense physical pain upon your form. Even after I have freed you from this place, there will be no escape. You gave me your soul. It is mine. Remember this and your existence will not be so terrible. As I said, I am not a harsh master.”

“I understand, master.”

“Do not call me any such titles. They are not necessary. Your soul is bound to me and that is enough. Simply address me as you did before. It is much more pleasant for the both of us that way.”

“I understand. What must I do?”

“Follow me.”

And so I did. As he faded away, so did I.

I learned many things from him. I learned how to fight in my new world and how to trap others the same way he did. He gave me power and I wielded it against his enemies and to do his bidding. I learned much about the machinations and the laws of my new world. When he sent me back to my world, I always did what I was sent to do singlemindedly. I killed those whose souls he wanted and helped him trap them. I brought him so many souls, so much power. The lucky ones would be pressed into servitude, the others were devoured. He needed them as sustenance and they were the source of his power. What he didn’t need, he would give to me or his others servants, so that we would survive and continue to serve him. It was pure cannibalism, to devour the soul of another. As time passed, the mortal form my mind had given to me began to change and disappear. I changed because I let go of my past self, although the consumption of others’ souls might have had a corruptive effect on my form as well. In the end, I became just like him, a dark being with a low and vibrating voice. I did not always remain a prisoner though. Eventually, my captor died at the hands of another, one of his competitors. I felt his destruction the moment it happened. My soul was freed, my chains broken, a burden lifted, but soon I became tired. I required sustenance and without anyone to provide for me, I had to provide for myself. I needed a soul. So I took one. I trapped one in the dark until he gave me his soul. The feeling I experienced when I consumed it myself was magnificent. The direct transmittal felt so much better than being given the scraps my master didn’t want. I wanted more. I needed more. I’m about to take my 35th soul, though this one I do not intend to consume. This one will be a servant. I will teach him the ways of this world, to trap souls and bring them to me so that I may have the power and feeling I crave. It’s a man who died in a car accident, a man whose death I engineered. He waits for me in the darkness now. He will resist at first. He will cling to his life, his morality, his notions of death and the afterlife, but he will break. They all break. I broke.