

It was the 5th of November when the man came to me at a crossroads in my life. You see, I am a starving artist, as some may say. I have been a photographer and writer for what feels like most of my life. Yet here I am, working a dead-end job with my work being forgotten in the shadows. I have always had the imagination most wouldn't my age. While all my peers were getting degrees, I was writing poems and engulfing myself in the world of my own thoughts and views on the world around me.

The man came to me at dawn on the 5th of November. The man appeared to be otherworldly; he walked with a cane, and his black suit seemed to be from the fashion of the last century. I could tell right away that he wasn't your normal homeless man or tweaker in the street. He had a very demanding presence, yet I felt no fear. I was strangely calm and in no way afraid. It started with him questioning why I was walking alone in the rougher part of the city and saying, "I should really watch my back," with a slight quiver in his voice. I assured the man that I could hold my own. As he is staring at me intently, he tells me how much he enjoyed my recent poetry collection, "Peephole into the Soul," to him, I had the talent to be "one of the greats." While yes, the compliment was nice, I hadn't yet released the book to the public. It has sat in my drafts for several months now out of fear of the sheer vulnerability of it all. My family, friends, and peers may come across the collection, and who knows what they may think. Regardless, the man knew of something I had yet to release, ultimately confirming that this man wasn't of this earth.

After our short interaction, he handed me a note asking me to meet him at this specified location at midnight. At the same time, my brain was screaming at me not to do such a foolish thing. My heart, my heart somehow knew that this man had the answers. This man knew something I didn't, and my curiosity ultimately led me to meet him that fateful night.

Biking over to the address provided in the note, I was at peace. It was a rather cold night. The moon hung high and bright in the sky, and the cool air made for a relatively peaceful experience. Not a thought in my head than the destination ahead. There seemed to be not a soul out at this time of night. This also led to my calm; I always enjoyed being alone on such nights. I didn't honestly know what I was walking into as I arrived. All my life, I have been wrapped up in anxiety and fear. For the first time, I am going into something without fear.

I arrived at a quarter to midnight. I observe the GPS and confirm that this is the place. I see a long dirt trail heading into the darkness of evergreens with a slight red glow down said path. I concluded that this must

be the man from which I encountered on the street. As I walked, I looked several times at the moon's ominous glow to make sure it was still there, I presume.

After several minutes of walking, I arrived. I saw the man sitting in what appeared to be a pentagram. As I got closer, I realized it was a shape I had never seen before. Candles surround the man and light him in a peculiar light. He's in all black again, but this time, a dark black cloak with the hood covering most of his face. After several seconds, he asked me to join him in the circle. Again, my brain was screaming, even cussing at me to get the fuck out of there and never turn back. But I couldn't; this man had something I wanted. I couldn't leave and live with the knowledge I would never know. Without hesitation, I joined him in the circle. Inside, I can see his face more clearly. He has a deep scar across one eye and a small wart on his right cheekbone. The man appears to be old, young, knowledgeable, and quick-witted.

He looks at me with deep, sunken eyes, "I know what you seek." I looked at him curiously, "You seek fame and notoriety, for your work to touch the masses, to be..." he trails off for a second, then continues, "to be one of the best to do it." I shake my head, saying nothing. "Well, I can bring you your wishes under one condition: you renounce all that you love; your love is for writing and the act of creating nothing more, nothing less." "Finding love in others will lead to your unfortunate downfall, my child." I again say nothing, only shaking my head, knowing that what I am gaining is worth more than the love of others. I am nothing more than a poet; my words mean more than life itself; I seek only to touch those who dare read my work.

The cloaked man begins the ritual while I sit and analyze. I don't think of much; again, a deep calm has washed over me since meeting him, and I have no rational fear of what's coming. The man made a lot of strange movements that intrigued me a little; the wind moved violently at parts, and when the ritual was wrapping up, the candles went out at once—leaving us sitting in the darkness of the woods, hearing only the cicadas and owls off into the distance. As I analyzed my surroundings, I found that the man had vanished. I felt no different than before and even questioned if this was all just some arouse.

Several days later, I decided to post my poetry collection "Peephole into the Soul," after several hours, I got dozens of calls from publishers. I cannot believe my ears. Do people genuinely think my work is worth publishing?

Everything is happening so fast it is almost overwhelming. I have signed to a publisher; my collection is being talked about everywhere. =Which is insane, but I know so many strangers know me on a deep, deep level. Most probably don't even know what I look like. That is a bizarre feeling, yet I am on the path to becoming one of the many greats.

Today, I met a girl on the train; she recognized me from my work and was the first to notice me from my writing. She told me I was a lot cuter in person. I'm not very good with compliments. After the introductions were complete, she asked me to dinner. I happily obliged and got off on my stop. However, something was lingering in the back of my head. The man told me never to fall in love. That was the one stipulation.

I met the girl on the train for dinner at Razolis, an Italian restaurant on the Upper East Side. Her name is Breanna, and she was possibly one of the most pleasant girls I've ever sat for dinner with. To be honest, what the man told me didn't really concern me while I was with her. She had an electrifying feel just like he had. Instead, hers made me want something more than knowledge or understanding. I wanted her.

After what only felt like an hour when really it was more like 4 hours, we said our goodbyes, and I made my way for the train. I feel myself falling hard for this girl but not truly knowing what will come if I do. What will happen to me or my work?

I decided to really test out if the ritual conducted would make any of my work notable. I went into the back catalog and pulled out a novel I had written several years ago that I never had the guts to put out for the world to see. The book is about a man and his dog after nuclear fallout wipes out most of the globe; pretty original, I know. But that's precisely why I am putting it out there. Could I become the next JK Rowling off a lousy book?

The book has been published, and it is all anyone can talk about; it is much bigger than any poem collection I've released. I have old peers from my time in primary school contacting me. People haven't heard from me in 20-plus years. What the hell is going on, literally?

I've made it onto the New York Times bestseller list, something I have dreamt of since I began this whole writing journey of mine several years ago. My mother called; she told me she was so proud of me and that all of her coworkers were telling her how "incredible" the novel was. I haven't heard my mom say she was proud of me in years. I cannot remember the last time someone spoke those words to me. I began to cry but quickly

changed the subject and ended the phone call. I have gotten all this notoriety, all this fame and recognition, but was it even my doing? Or was it the man in the forest and the wicked spell? What have I done? I am no writer, no poet. I had to practically sell my soul for my mother to tell me she was proud of me. What have I done?

I lay awake at night wondering if this fame I have gained is more of a curse than anything else. I feel more empty than I had before. I feel like no one really understands me despite seemingly everyone having read a piece of my work. Fame has added more confusion than I had clarity like I had hoped. More success and being content in my own skin.

I went out to a local bar with Breanna last night. She is truly something special, I'm telling you. When I'm with her, I don't think about the curse, the man, the writings, any of it. It is her and only her. However, something strange did occur while we were together last. We had just gotten parked and were heading in; I reached for her hand. The best way I could describe it is like two magnets repelling each other. I fear the curse has prevented me from truly loving someone, including gestures of the sort.

Today, I searched for the man who brought this curse onto me. I wanted answers; I felt like he knew this was going to happen, and I wanted to give him a piece of my mind. I was scared, angry, and confused; all of it pointed at this one man. I searched for hours along the street in the woods where the curse took place. He was nowhere to be found. I fear he has left this earth. His divine purpose was completed. He ruined my life and vanished.

Why did I agree to such an insane offer? What did I think was going to happen? Did I think I would be happy and content and have everyone falling for me and my work? Why didn't I see this coming? Why didn't I question anything that was happening? I'm such a fool.

I tried dialing Breanna today, but it appears her phone line must be disconnected. It seems I have fallen in love, and as the curse said, that is not to take place. So here I am, more miserable than I was before. Everyone loves my work and adores me; I keep getting calls from radio and news stations seeking to interview me. Continuous calls from agents and publishers looking to have me at the top of their lists. Yet, I ignore every call. I only wish to have my old, mundane life back.

I fear I have fallen into a deep depression as I have previously, before the man, before Breanna, when I was nothing more than a name writer. I fear I have come full circle. The fame, the notoriety, it all means nothing. I am a

fake, a fraud; I did not earn this. I am nothing.

I called my mom today, and she praised and praised me to no end, yet it still felt fake. I am no longer her son; I am merely a topic in her social circles. She isn't proud of her son; she is simply proud of his accomplishments that I did not earn.

I feel my will to live diminishing daily. Everyone is still calling and texting me, but again, none of it feels real. Where were they when I was a no-name writer? The only relationship that I thought in the slightest way real was mine with Breanna, and she's undoubtedly gone from my life forever because of this god-forsaken curse done unto me.

I fear my only way out of this hell I've put myself in is to end it all simply. The walls are closing in, and I feel increasingly disconnected from reality by the day. I hear voices, beings, telling me to do unspeakable things. I fear this curse has manipulated my brain, or maybe it was my own doing; who knows at this point?

I have decided this is my last entry; I cannot take this torture anymore; no one is here for me anymore, only what I can bring them. I am ready to pass on into another lifetime. To all my readers, thank you for reading my books, even if it is in vain. Goodbye All.

-Samuel