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**Tale of a Mad Man**

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Tale of a Mad Man

They open the creaky door of room 42, up on the ceiling there’s a moth flying around the light. The room is dim, empty, with an aura of humid mist all around.

They each pick a bed, sit down, and turn to face each other, “care for a cigarette?” Jacob asks.

“Why not?” His prisoner replied.

Two packs of cigarettes are pulled out of the dark-yellow box. The two men quietly enjoy their tobacco. Jacob observes his prisoner silently: the young man’s hands are locked in handcuffs. Under the flashing white light his face looks as pale as ivory. He has a pair of deep, lonesome eyes, the color of a winter’s frozen lake. They look like they belong to an artist, Jacob thinks, while the white smoke covers their faces, a dancer, a singer, an actor -- not a serial killer.

There’s an awkward silence between them for a while, then the young man breaks the tension.

“So, what are they planning for me?” The prisoner asks.

Jacob looks at him in surprise, like he just saw him kill a thousand chickens, “what do you think, cake and milk?” He answers in a mocking tone.

The youth moves his body forward, he notices the slight laugh inside the man’s tone, and replies with an innocent smile: “Death by hanging is my best guess.”

“You don’t seem to realize what you are saying.” Jacob’s eyebrows scrunched together.

“In fact, I do. I know what death is, as well as the fear of watching a life slowly fade away.”

I made a mistake, Jacob thinks to himself. His little prisoner had been behaving politely, which made Jacob almost forget that this man was actually a brutal killer. He touches the gun inside his pocket. “Well, then why even bother to ask? It’s clear that you understand this is a secret execution, that’s why we are going to do it in the countryside.”

The boy pauses a bit, a strange sadness glinting in his eyes. “I just wonder what the end of my story looks like in another’s view.”

“Your story?” Jacob answers sarcastically, “killing seven men irresponsibly, burning three houses into dust, causing panic and despair towards the public for three entire weeks, and now you want to find some reason to defend yourself?”

“I am not defending myself.” After another long silence, the youth speaks again. “I am not begging for mercy or anything like that. I thought there were going to be journalists coming to my cage before the execution starts, but it doesn’t matter now. Talking to you will just be the same thing, someone will remember me, somehow.”

Jacob sits upright, leans forward and grabs the man’s collar: “You know I can kill you right here and pretend like it's an accident, right?” His voice is filled with anger. “Behave, kid, or I don’t know what I am going to do.”
He tries to find even a single ounce of dread inside the kid’s eyes, but there’s nothing.

The youth looks right into his eyes and gently nods. Jacob releases the boy’s clothes violently. “I apologize for all the inconvenience I brought to you,” the boy replies, “as a small compensation, do you want to hear the reason for my actions?”

“So, you mean you have the right to kill?”

“No, I mean I have a reason for it, I am not trying to beg for a way to survive, I am ready to die for my guilt.”

“Alright then,” Jacob said, “try your best to impress me.”

The youth begins to speak.

II

I was born in the year of the plague, a time when humans were worth less than dogs on the street. I remember how quiet the street once was, like the town was a silent abattoir. The illness was our butcher. My friends and I used to play on the street. There was a shining river near our house, surrounded by crimson roses. You could see corpses flowing down the river with greenish pale faces that summer. The dead bodies were bloated and stinking, the shadow of vines grew like a tree tattooed on their bodies, as green as the branches of roses. We picked up those flowers from that river, twisted them into rings and played with them. Ruby-red flowers laid in our hands, just as the bloody sputum spat out by my dying father. Growing up in an environment like this, death greeted me as an acquaintance in its most hair-curling way.

I still remember sitting near my father’s bed, watching him moan in pain while slowly getting weaker and weaker. His skin was tinted black, those small buds slowly blossom, like the flower of death, till they spread to every part of his body. I was sitting near him, with a tiny story book in my hands. People once said that I was insane to watch my only kin die in front of me without crying or screaming. But death was always calmer than life. The dead never complain, the dead never blame, they only quietly fall asleep, all away from the unfortunate world they once suffered in. What should we fear, if the only thing that comes with death is eternal peace? It’s like going home.

Many friends of mine didn’t survive the plague either. We didn’t have the chance to go to their funerals because plague patients were all burnt in the same place, and their ashes were dropped into the common graveyard. Old people said that we would eventually build a monument for everyone after the plague ended. But for us kids, all we knew was that our friends were constantly disappearing. They came to the playground, we had fun together, argued, shook our hands and went home. The next day some of us came back, others never again.

I once gave a daisy to a little girl with sea blue eyes. She kissed me on the forehead and blessed me good luck. But she was gone, too. I left a daisy on the monument after the plague went away.

That was the darkest time of this country; people were trapped by the fear of death. Their numbness grew through their spines, no one talked on the street anymore,
the cafe was closed, so was the cinema. We constantly dressed in black, like ravens, for we were always mourning. The fire of burning corpses grew day and night, ashes of the dead took the blue sky away from us, all that was left was our insignificant memories — which soon faded away too, when the war came to us.

In these days, tales about death and the Grim Reaper were common. Old people said that the shade under trees is where Thanatos lays his wings. That metaphor still haunts me today. That’s how I began my life: with tears and moaning of the sick ones.

We didn’t know then that this disease was planned. That all this suffering was orchestrated by a foreign country, the only nation that still exists on Earth.

I heard the stories of old colonists who came to America with their guns, germs and steel. They came with their advanced civilizations, and completely destroyed the old Indian residences in just a couple years. I also knew the story of the Homo sapiens replacing Neanderthals. But I never thought there would be a time when my friends and I would become the Neanderthals. I didn’t realize this fact till the war finally came. After all these centuries, we humans still use our intelligence as the quickest way to eliminate ‘outsiders’.

They came quietly, just like the plague. Soldiers dressed in completely black protective suits. We woke up that day and saw a bunch of iron birds flying upon the sky. “That’s the angel of death,” some old men said, “they finally came to harvest our life.”

It was the first time I saw that great technology created by the outside world, the world our country refused to take part in because of our proud romantic traditions. They intentionally spread the plague into our country to make us defenseless. They treated us like dangerous animals in the zoos, who need to be tranquilized first in order to be domesticated in the name of freedom and future. On that day, I saw those giant iron birds open their wings, flying through our town like the arrival of Apocalypse; electrical insects, covered in neon blue iron, climbed through every wall of our towns, building cables and antennas on the top of our houses; every statue that once presented our town’s history was destroyed. No past record was required for this new territory they conquered. I saw people walking in our room without invitations, holding shining metal and crystal weapons in their hands. Just as the way Spanish walked into the Aztec Emperor’s camp, they urged us to move out of our houses and settle at a temporary camp.

I heard more than ten thousand screams from millions of innocent people, those who dared to fight back were executed immediately. When we were pushed out of our house, we saw the shining river dyed in blood, stiff hands and legs still reaching out of the surface begging for mercy. I heard one of the begging sounds come from my dearest friend. He was only five years old, being lifted out of the surface of the river by his mother’s remaining arm.

I never heard a boy’s scream like that before, it sounded like a piglet squealing in front of the slaughter house.

“Mum, Mum, I am scared! I don’t want to die! Mum, help me, Help me!”

A soldier threw a blue bomb into that river, then everything suddenly went as quiet as snow. The whole river was frozen by this new technology created by the
outside world.
Everyone was still looking up at me from the ice, with their twisted faces now frozen forever, like they were still begging for me to help.

But I couldn’t do anything.
That soldier yawned impatiently, and dragged us across that frozen river, straight to the camp.
I couldn’t do anything.
My best friend died in front of me, I could almost see those frozen tears hanging above his eyes.
I couldn’t do anything.
“Mission completed,” I heard the soldier said to his flying bug machine. “Tell Maria I will come back home earlier today, I can’t wait to see the new painting she did in kindergarten.”

They don’t even consider us to be human beings.

The young prisoner pauses for a moment, he looks at his guard’s reaction while the night outside the window darkens. Jacob opens his mouth several times, but he can’t find the correct words to say, it seems like words are useless in this circumstance — you can’t erase the pain life brings you through words.

“Our past was gone forever,” the youth looks outside of the window, a complex expression on his face. Jacob can’t tell whether its sadness or rage, for his face is covered by the shadow of the night. “Technology is magical, isn’t it? It makes killing much easier.”

III

We became new members of ‘the world’, as the remnants dragged out of our destroyed countries, we became the living testament of the outside world’s civilizing process. The perfect toys, the fresh example that proved the mercy of this world has been given to the forgotten city. Our backgrounds were erased, and a completely new story was instilled into our brains. They want us to become perfect normal kids, just like other kids from this world. We have been taught in their civilized way, to use only the materials they provided for us to study, repeating all this information again and again. They tried to force us to believe that what they have done was for eternal peace and the greater good of mankind. As we were growing up, they used propaganda and education to soften our minds, turning us from ‘others’ to ‘them.’

First is the replacement of some names, then the disappearance of some nouns.
They cut Thomas Jefferson’s name from the history book for he was a slave owner, then soon the words slave owner was gone with him too; they burned the works of Shakespeare, for he once supported the murder of and discrimination towards Jewish people, then the definition of ‘Jewish’ disappeared too; they cleaned the whole medieval century, erased the Nautical era, slowly and patiently cut off every colonists’ name. After they finished these works, they gathered all the knowledge that remained, and made a new book. “It will be a pure and holy book, without any horrifying features once included in our past,” the writer once visited our
school, and happily said of his work, “yes, we will teach you guys the true majesty of this world, not a single flavor of blood will be tasted by you anymore.”

Some countries tried to rebel against ‘the world’, but it was too late. Ivan the Terrible, who beat his son to death, was erased from the memory of the past era without a single doubt; Napoleon, for the high amount of tax he collected for war, suffered the same fate; Rousseau treated his kids in a merciless way, gone; Tolstoy beat his wife, deleted. All of these figures and all of this history, which once included violence, war, injustice and pain, was completely destroyed. The only thing left inside this new era was the edited human history: the history of love and peace. All that was included in the book was merciful Jesus and his brothers and sisters. There’s no hunger, there’s no cold, no stoning, no record of clans killing each other for power. They called this new human history \textit{The Tale of Eden}.

“No more original sin, only love,” a beautiful girl smiles gently inside the promotional video, “only the cleanest life, that is our gift to you, the younger generation. We killed and conquered, but not anymore, from now on, you will receive a world without a single evil — You don’t need to pray before you sleep, don’t need to give thanks before you eat. No pain you shall receive in the rest of your life, for the guilt of your ancestors has disappeared forever.”

“It might be a hard decision for those old-fashioned people, or those who still suffer from the pain of their past.” She added, “but think about this, a brand-new world, all the kids we can help in the future! When you think about the future of human beings, no matter who you are, you will understand this movement. It’s forever atonement from our memory — everything we did was for you, you innocent kids!”

“There will be no more honor and no more competition. Anything with the possibility of provoking your destructive desires or unfair torment will be completely deleted. The kids from the new era will be born only from artificial uteruses; it’s nicer than a mother’s, warmer than a mother’s. They will take a pill to make them all born with both sexual organs, so the inequality caused by body type will be erased too. They will dress in the same clothes, the same shoes, the same watches, the same care from cradle to grave. In order to prevent them from questioning their own identity, they will share one name and one name only, we will call them all ‘one.’ The unique one, one alone, but one for everyone else. Everyone will be one, the precious, beautiful one.”

“None will worry about jobs anymore; artificial intelligence will take care of everything. Fertility is an unnecessary process, and the affection caused by the will of reproduction is a problem we need to solve. Every kid is a precious baby, we will vaccinate them far before they have any memories: the anti-love vaccine. This will protect them from any dangers, anything that might make them suffer, anything that might cause them to be confused. They will grow up in the same way, the gene spectrum inside their body will be edited all in the same style, like everyone else. The only knowledge they are required to know about this world will be saved inside the chip, in every soft music we played for them at night. All the music will be made by beautiful harmony and peace, no rock and roll, and no jazz or any electronic music.
This is the only type of music the new generation will need.”

“Human history was a bloody wheel, rolling on the fuel of hatred. It’s our job to stop this wheel forever, burn it all, and create a peaceful, beautiful society from its ashes. We will conquer our memories, our ancestors. We will conquer every history we created from the past, every behavior, every gene, by any means necessary. All we did is to extend the free will of mankind, to spread the noblest humanity — we have no guilt inside our heart, only happiness.”

I still remember that young girl put her hand on her chest, she looks at us like the Virgin Mary looking at her innocent sheep: “No more child should suffer from our past traditions, no more woman needs to reproduce their child in pain. Only logic and the power of science will lead us forward, we will build up a world like this, built up artificial sun, the new Babylon, true heaven on earth. A new society which you shall never receive pain from the unknown, we will create a world like this for you.”

She smiled in the most satisfied way: “Join us for the honor of mankind, then on one day we could say these sentences without any shame — our lives have no stain, only the love towards people and the world.”

“We will move to the end of evaluation and enjoy endless happiness forever at here.”

“That day I solemnly promised to myself: I will never allow that to happen.”

The youth raises his face and looks straight to Jacob’s eyes with a strong determination burning inside of his eyes. “I would not allow people like them wipe off my family, the culture I was raised in, like getting rid of a hornet nest — I don’t care whether it’s justice or not, people bled and screamed and died in front of me, people who played with me and loved me — I allow no one to deny their existence. I will do everything I can for my revenge.”

The sun is slowly rising up outside the window.

IV

It took a long-time, patience, and obedience to grow up without having my memories erased from my brain, but with the fire of revenge inside my heart, I eventually made it.

After I grew up from that living hell, I quickly realized the fact that I was surrounded by a lot of ‘sample’ kids who were taken from their original environment. I believed that if I could get enough knowledge, I might be able to persuade them to trust me, and maybe even join me in my revenge.

I found many abandoned books outside the landfill of the countryside. They were forbidden, and prohibited from the society at that point, but I believe I could find the way to achieve my revenge from them. That’s why I read a lot of books, books which once talked about this malicious world and the solution once provided to solve these problems forever. I searched for every chance to read, finding books outside the incinerator and trash cans. From the poems of Shelley, the novels of Dostoevsky and Sartre, political criticism of Russell, to even the erotic novel of D. H. Lawrence, I read it all. I sensed the brightest and the darkest part of human beings; I saw the most unbelievable imagination our species had about the space.
I experienced all those marvelous pieces inside my books, felt my soul attach to the noblest human in the history. I practiced public speech, debate, boxing and even judo, and spent all my time on building up leadership, gaining support from my unfortunate sibs. I thought by stealing all these outsider’s knowledge, I could find a way to invoke people’s hidden rage, and eventually lead them to the rebellion and independence.

But I underestimated the power of entertainment and sorrow. Many people, who experienced the same past history as me, volunteered to wash up their memories. They told me that all they want was peace, just like people who died from the past. A petition was passed to inhibit the discussion about those bloody histories, which was supported by a huge number of the ‘refuge kids’ from the conquered world. They say they don’t want to bear the weight of the past anymore. They looked at me, telling me that it’s time to move on, to accept the new life and the new task of human beings — what ridiculous words to say! What a cowardly attitude!

But they did it anyway, they washed their own brains, freed themselves from the painful past, and then turned into the endless entertainments and assigned work provided from the authority. Without a single worry of those people who died to protect them from the world’s tyranny.

Every time I looked at the reality, I saw the disappointing truth everywhere: people’s lives became so boring, that they would actually feel excited about the over dramatic TV shows! It’s like my youth had been a long-forgotten joke; no one valued the weight of life anymore. We live in an age without heroes, an era which all the legends we heard about as kids have faded away.

There’s no morality because there’s no guilt; we have nothing to worry about -- unlike our ancestors—we don’t even need to take responsibility for our own survival because we believe there will always be a society to take care of us! What a lazy reprobate species we have let ourselves become...The more I learned about the banality of evil of our kind, the harder it became for me to endure the continuation of my meaningless life.

I tried lots of things to erase this feeling, I joined those secret rebellion party to plan for the future of our country, they were the hope and light of my life once, I remember all the time we sat together and planed out our future with a stick on the sand. Even though they all became cold corpses hanging on the trees, I still refuse to give up. I visited hospitals and schools, taught them the knowledge I owned, persuaded kids to have a higher view of the world: just like me. Even though the authority took part in it and take away all the resource I had to continue my teaching. My hope was once teared apart. However, I still refuse to give up. Having considered that this feeling of emptiness might come from the lack of real excitement, I tried to face on my own spiritual life and rely on my mind to bring me peace and strength. I once threw myself into a forest to experience the exclusion of civilization. I tried parachuting, driving a plane, fighting against bears unarmed. From army marching to every dangerous protest parade, I tried all the things that would let you put a tag of courage on it. But none of them worked. No matter how hard I tried, I still could not change anything about our society’s idleness, I cannot find peace in my mind. To this
world, my name is just letters written on the water. We the humans are choking by our pleasure and desires, walking toward the end of our history without even noticing it is there.

*I need to change this horrible event, I told myself, no matter what it takes, I must save my fellow citizens from this delightful nightmare*—and that is the time I thought of the poem by Keats: “If I never experience the deepest pain, then I will never be able to understand the highest joy.” I realized this fact: only if I take away others’ freedom, will they finally realize my existence. Only if I am willing to suffer from the most serious guilt of the world—to take away other people’s lives, then there will be a possibility for me to understand the true value of my life and for others to realize the beauty of freedom. The fear of death: the most common emotion we as humans have in this world. It connects us together and evokes sympathy inside our hearts. Killing is the only way for us to truly be alive.

And I did it.

In the last family, the general, who once took charge of the elimination of my hometown, had a granddaughter. She was a girl with sea blue eyes and blonde hair, just like that little girl who once gave me the daisy. She was looking at me, crying out loud in fear, like everyone who once suffered from that plague. She was saying the same thing: “Mommy, Daddy, help me, I don’t want to die, I don’t want to die! Mommy, Mommy!”

I looked at her with all those memories of my past flying through my head. I knew if I let this girl go, it would be a relief in my heart, an excuse I could tell myself when I am facing the last judgement. But I want no excuse for myself, I want no ticket to heaven. I remember the feeling of all the ghosts from my past looking at me, looking at this crying girl. She will become the symbol of the new era if she survived. She will be praised as the noblest figure, the one who lived from the fear of the past, who conquered devil’s heart, the symbol of humanity — the one who extinguished the fire of rage. She will live the rest of her life as this holy figure, there’s no other choices for her, so as me.

That’s why the trigger gave.

I am the whip of the God. I am the fly who bites the butt of Athens, the outsider who compromised to the beauty of the world. Before I die, I will be able to speak out in front of all the citizens of this country. I will express my thought to them, urge them to wake up from their comfortable dying lives—after me, the flood.

The youth finishes his speech, Jacob pauses for a long time, he once again looks at this crazy young man like he is from outer space.

V

“*You shouldn’t kill a little girl, there’s no excuse for you to take away an innocent life like this.*”

“I should. It’s the only way I could free her from this insane world.”

“What you did is insane.”

“Or maybe I am the only sane person who still lives in this disgusting heaven.”

“The society showed you mercy!”
“The society destroyed me.”  
“You are just jealous of the love you didn’t receive in the past.”  
The youth smiles.  
“I am not jealous, I feel very sorry for them. All those people who need to suffer from my decision. But I truly don’t care about people who will be born after me. What good is it for me to sacrifice myself for the enemy’s children but people of my kind need to die in injustice and fear? Life was unfair, and life should be unfair, till every justice has been brought down — an eye for an eye -- then it will finally be the time for us to talk about creating a great new world.”  
“You —”  
The door opens.  
“It’s time for execution. Sir.”  
The sun rises.

VI  
Many things ran into his mind before his death.  
The beautiful starry night he witnessed when he was 16 with his first love, the iron blue eyes of that girl, the watering eyes flashed in the darkness while he kissed her face.  
The pealed face of his old yearning father: he was dying when he came back from work. The old twisted shaking hands, which once were mighty and strong — the flame inside his eyes was fading, “rage, rage against —” words left unheard in the air. He stayed with his father for the rest of the three days, quietly watched the old man’s body corrupt and melt into the sheets. The last mysterious smile the face of this dying old fellow — he remembers being dragged out of the stinky house. He remembers those helpless flies which once danced in the burning flame of the house.  
He remembers the noblest thing a woman once did, nourishing a homeless infant with her chest. The soldier came along and pierced that poor child with a long black spear, and that woman was raped right under the infant’s corpse. He remembers the sound she made, the beg she pledged, the desperate cry she shouted out — the watering iron blue eyes she once owned but now burned by the fire. He remembers all of them.  
Oh, sweet child of mine — he remembers the lullaby his mother once sang to him, the warm embrace he once was in, he remembers the structure of the stars, the fresh smell of ripened apples, the fresh smell of death. He remembers his best friend holding his hand tightly, breathed out his last breath and closed his eyes. He remembers feeling the body once warm and strong turning cold inside his arm. “Death shall have no dominion —” who said that? The past was gone with the wind, what can he still remember?  
He remembers the long endless line he waited in to get a piece of bread and a glass of water, and he remembers watching young innocent children die from the sudden plague. He remembers all those prayers: dressed in silk and gold. He remembers their beautiful faces and friendly laugh, the laugh his beloved one once had but not anymore. All those people who are blessed by their lord — “oh thank you,
thank you —” He remembers the last sentence that little girl said: “Mama, why did God abandon me?” Oh, he remembers… he remembers them all.

What a pleasant journey he has been through! He remembers the warm scene of the sand, he remembers the feeling of heaven when he touched his loved one’s lips. He remembers all those innocent people who suffered from unjust treatment — oh, the love towards humans, oh the sympathy, the helpless feelings, the guilt, the joy, the wonderful death. Oh, he remembers them all.

None will ever understand him, none have seen what was once inside his eyes, and none will ever understand the hidden love he holds for the human beings — how could they understand love, if they never experienced death before?

His memories start to disappear. So, along with his life, he still remembers — he does not remember anything at all — he could see the welcome smile of his lover and the laugh of his child. What a pleasant journey, what an unbelievable life, there’s nothing to regret — oh here it comes, here it comes, the sweet peaceful death he has been waiting for all these years. Oh, the lovely colorful life, the paint of blood and the pain of heart — here it comes!