

Reflections

“For when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.”

Quote by
Friedrich Nietzsche.

“Well, here we are again, J,” said William Brimmel, rubbing his sleepless eyes, glancing nervously across the small desk in front of him. It had been another anxious night of nagging thoughts and fear over having to face *the reprehensible* again in the morning, and he could already feel the heaviness of his eyelids droop and throbbing pain in his left hand. It wasn't the state of mind he wanted to be in only seconds into the interrogation. "Are you going to talk to me today, or is it just gonna be more of the same shit?"

William had never fallen asleep the previous night, not even a wink. He had felt the hours slip helplessly by watching the darkness of the room gradually give way to lighter and lighter shades until the blackness around him had dissolved into a foggy gold signaling the start of a new day. A new day that he had been dreading since he had lied down the night before, and in fact, had been dreading for the past several weeks, ever since he had first come face to face with J -- *the reprehensible*, the psychopath.

William had spent his fair share of time around troubled people before in his line of work, but J was the first one who truly scared him deep down in the pit of his stomach. Over the years, William had met and interrogated hundreds of criminals, from thieves and con men to rapists and killers, but none had come scared him like his current assignment. J was, without question, an utter psychopath. He possessed a devilish, almost inhuman, ability to crawl inside a person's mind and stay there long before they even had a chance to realize what was happening. Look up psychopath in the dictionary, and it read like a biography for J -- manipulative, lacking

in empathy, compulsive liar, no regard for human decency. These characteristics were the very essence of what made him who he was, and there was a terror about him that made William's skin crawl just to look at him across the table. In a very real sense, he was evil in the flesh, and William Brimmel was all too aware of the mounting stakes at play regarding this latest faceoff between the two.

The first move had been William's, but now it was J's turn to respond. Rather than answering his question, J gazed back across the table, silent, deadpan, expressionless, following William's facial movements and eyes intently with his own. This was how he had started every interview with William, and horrifyingly, he seemed to feed off the silence and fear he struck in his questioner, a vampire sucking his victim dry of life.

"I asked you a question, J," said William, breaking eye contact, rubbing his eyes again.

The sense of dread and fear was building, and William knew that if he kept his eyes fixed on J too long, he risked losing himself entirely into the mind of J, and that was a place he desperately didn't want to find himself. That was a place there would be no coming back from.

"Do you know what a reflection really is?" asked J abruptly.

"What?" The question had caught William off guard, and he was surprised at the sound of his own voice answering so quickly.

"It shows a person who they really are," said J, cocking his head sideways. It was a deranged habit that reminded William of a dog trying to hear something off in the distance. "It doesn't matter the situation; a reflection never lies. It will *always* show a person who they really are in their truest form."

William took a moment to get control of his thoughts, searching for his words carefully. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, J,” he finally replied, mindful not to get sucked into one of J’s head games.

It wasn’t uncommon for J to ask seemingly random questions during their little chats, but William, nevertheless, always became unsettled when J started in with his own line of inquiry. He had the feeling J was always three steps ahead of his one, and he was constantly worried about what the end of the game would bring. In chess, it meant checkmate, and the thought of that during these conversations always terrified William more than anything else.

“Pictures can be manipulated, enhanced, changed, but a real reflection is constant and unchanging. It is, in essence, truly the thing it embodies, nothing more, nothing less, just that.”

“I’m not interested in this shit,” said William, eyes falling to the floor, anxious to stop the conversation before J could get into a rhythm. “Why don’t we talk about the things you’ve done?”

J stared back at William, unblinking, expressionless.

“What do you suppose animals think when they see themselves in the water, Will?” His questions were cryptic, and William could sense a trap in taking the bait. “Pride, surprise, vanity?” J went on, relaxed, having fun. “I don’t imagine they feel anything at all. They just know that they’re there, that they’re alive.”

“Honestly, J, I don’t care,” said William softly. He already knew from past interactions that his answers wouldn’t make a difference. Once J started in on an idea, nothing would stop him from acting on it. There wasn’t a threat, a question, or an argument that would break the

hideous spell once it started. If J was intent on seeing his darkest impulses and desires reach the surface, they would.

"Humans, my guess is, don't have such a luxury," continued J, wholly undeterred by William's objections. "No, they see every blemish, imperfection, every awful thing there is to see, and not only in themselves, but everyone else around them. And what's worse is they actually look for a clearer image." J smiled a twisted, hideous grin. "But the clearer the image is, the worse it gets."

William could feel himself being pulled in, slipping, and J could feel it too. "J, I told you I don't care about your riddles."

J smiled back across the desk, unflinching.

Make him stop, thought William Brimmel. *Just shut him up, now!* William's own anger and fear were growing. Why had J become his problem anyway? Several other detectives had the same level of experience; why was he singled out and forced to deal with this nut job? There wasn't anything special about him, he thought, growing more incensed at the idea. Other detectives had seen the same violence he had seen over the years. Why should he alone have to deal with J? The thoughts continued to cycle through William's mind, one after another, angrier, more resentful, as he struggled against being consumed into J's sick world.

J paused, drew a breath, and started in again. "I used to drive myself crazy with these optical illusions. Are they swans or elephants, angels or devils? And then it finally hit me; It's neither. It's a cruel joke, a sick fuckin game, and you know what it creates....chaos. It's hatred -- fighting to prove who's right and who's wrong, and why? Because people always and unquestioningly choose to see what they want to see."

“I told you, I don’t care, J,” said William struggling to look away. He could feel himself descending deeper and deeper into J’s diseased mind whether he wanted to go there or not.

Shut him up, thought William again. *Just walk away.*

“What do you see right now when you look at me?” J twitched his head to one side, compulsively, with a crack.

“I see a sick, fucked-up person,” stammered William trying his best to maintain some level of composure. “Don’t talk about swans and elephants and angels and devils when I know damn well you see the devil.”

"That may be, Will, but at least I made up my mind while the rest of you spend your life wondering." J knew he had William hooked, and he started in again with cathartic energy that frightened William to his core. "Never knowing if you're on the good side or the bad, the moral or unethical, the happy or sad."

“Do you know what you’ve done, J, to your kids, your wife, to everyone around you, what you continue to do?”

"I wasn't always like this, you know," said J, the words pouring out, uncontrollable. "I had a family and kids that loved me. I was even happy once. I still smiled."

William took a deep breath, trying his hardest to fight the force from pulling him in, drawing him downward. "Somehow, I doubt that."

"It's true," continued J, feeding off the fear. "But do you really want to know what happiness is, Will? It's a mask, it's fake, and worst of all, even the illusion of it is fleeting. And

yet, we foolishly chase it like grasping at air expecting to catch something. The truth is, there's nothing there. It's not real." J stretched his arms into the air, smiling.

J stopped suddenly, staring, unblinking across the table. All this time William had been trying to avoid eye contact with him, hoping to avoid being drawn into his tortured world, but J had his gaze fully now, and he knew it.

"You don't believe I was happy once?" J's eyes fixed on William's, penetrating them deep down. "I have a picture that can prove it."

"I don't care about any pictures of you, J, so if you're not going to talk, I'm done here." It was a last-ditch effort to say or do anything he could to sidetrack J from continuing to lead him down the rabbit hole, down into his own personal hell.

"My wife would look at that picture and say, 'look how happy we were that day. Look at Charlie and Michael, you remember how happy they were when we told them about the carnival coming to town,'" said J relishing the idea of telling his own story. "But I don't remember any of that. I only remember how terrified my kids were of the clowns. I tried my best to explain that they were just wearing makeup to hide who they really were, that they were playing characters, dressing up like they had done on Halloween. But the truth is, I was scared of the clowns, too, Will. I was scared of the mask."

"That's enough!" William cried out. "If you aren't going to talk to me, I'm leaving, and you can sit here alone."

"That's when my wife suggested I take the kids into the maze of mirrors," continued J, undiscouraged. "I told her that I hated those things and didn't want to go in, but do you know

what she did, Will? She laughed at me and said I only hated them because of the way the mirrors made me look."

William pulled back from the desk.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said J, grinning maniacally. William froze, paralyzed with fear. "You asked me if I knew what I had done -- don't you want to hear how the story ends?"

This was it. The moment William had feared for the past several weeks, ever since he had first locked eyes with J, with this *thing*. They were coming up at the end of the story, and he knew what he needed to do, the only thing he really could do any longer. William pushed forward in his seat and looked J straight in the eyes, realizing that there would be no coming back in doing so. The only way out now was to reach the end of the story.

"My kids begged to go into the maze of mirrors," said J, continuing on with a more subdued expression. "My wife couldn't go in because the mirrors made her dizzy, so she told them I would take them. Can you believe that, Will!" yelled J sharply, unexpectedly. "Can you believe that, without even asking me? I became enraged with her for making me do something I didn't want to do. It was at that moment I realized what I truly was."

William was silent, afraid of what would happen next if he kept listening but equally terrified of looking away. He had gone too far this time to turn back now and not hear the end of the story.

"You call it sick; I call it normal," said J, resigned.

“That’s when you realized you were crazy?” asked William, still staring deep into J’s eyes, fists clenched, sore. “You know everyone isn’t like you, J.”

“No, I realized it wasn’t me that was crazy, but that it was everyone else that had the problem,” replied J, beaming with satisfaction. “Young couples in love holding hands and laughing as they ran into the mirrors right in front of their eyes. A girl laughing at her sister’s short, fat reflection in the mirror.”

“People in love, having fun, these were the people you realized were crazy, J?”

"Exactly!" cried out J, gleeful, happy. "See, they only saw what they wanted to see, but I could see them for what they truly were."

William had a strange feeling that a smile was beginning to form on the corner of his own lips. “And what was that, J?”

“I saw who those kids, those *innocent* people, really were.”

“You saw all that, huh?”

"I didn't have to see it," said J. "Their reflections betrayed them. See, even at that moment, the mirrors reflected the truth."

“And what was that, J?”

"You know exactly what I saw, Will," said J turning severe. "You were there. You saw it too."

William laughed aloud, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I wasn’t there, J.”

“What’s in your hand, Will?”

William looked down and realized he had been holding something in his clenched fist all this time. It was a picture of William and his children in the maze of mirrors. It was an amusement park photo with ghosts and monsters in the background.

“I’ve never seen this before in my life,” said William. He looked helplessly about the room. “How did you do that?”

“I didn’t, Will. You had it all along.”

William looked again at the picture. The lifeless eyes, the blank, distant stare, but it wasn’t the ghosts in the picture William was looking at. It was his own eyes that were lifeless, cold, dead.

“You don’t see it yet, do you?” J asked. “You will, and when you do, it’s gonna crush you. It’s gonna take away everything you have. Do you see it?”

William strained to look away, but he had lost control. “I don’t see what you see,” he said helplessly.

“You will,” replied J smiling, inching closer and closer. “Close your eyes, Will.”

William closed his eyes; J’s will controlling everything he did now.

“What do you see?”

“I don’t see anything.”

“You will. Now open your eyes.”

William opened his eyes, defeated, controlled.

"Now, what do you see?"

"What does it matter what I see?"

"Because perception is reality."

Tears were running down William's face.

"Take it back!" yelled William.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Will."

"God damn it, take it back!"

"You see it now, don't you? You finally see what I've been trying to show you."

"Take it back," mumbled William, trying to look away from the picture but unable to.

"Please, make it go away!"

Stacy could hear the shattering of glass coming from the bedroom upstairs. When she rushed into the room, she found William standing over the dresser covering his eyes, the bedroom mirror shattered.

"What happened, Will?"

"I didn't like what I saw," said William meekly. He was still looking at himself in the shattered pieces of glass, not knowing if it was J, the mirror, the picture, or just himself that he didn't like seeing.