# Being the Light in the Dark

The TVs switched over to the daily propaganda signaling an end to the work day. “The war effort needs your help!” sounded off from the overhead speakers. The voice always sounded like a typical movie drill sergeant, “Sign up today at your local military station,” it would say in its rough, demanding tone, “or help monetarily by buying bonds. Only you can make a difference." He let the noises roll past him as he made his way from his cubicle with the flow of his fellow programmers ready to go home. His team’s work consisted of listening algorithms. Secretly he called their work snooper formulas. They knew, despite the assurances the government agents told them about its use in the war, their work supported the ever growing infiltration into private life at home. *Lies*. He looked to the ceiling, posted in the corners of the room were cameras. *Ever watching, ever listening*.

Coming back to himself he began walking again. *I have to be more careful*. Being different may have been good once but now it only left you exposed in the crowd. That was when he felt pin pricks up his arms. He looked over and there he was. The black suit perfectly assimilated onto the pale skin with curt firmness. And there stood Agent Thanatos with his eyes, cold, dead eyes leveled directly at him.

The war changed many things, many of which were not immediately apparent. The veneer shattered the day government troops manning key workplaces turned on the populace. It started so suddenly; as workers clocked in certain ones were taken under custody for conspiracy against the states. No one knew what to believe; these were all good people. Still no one dared affront the officials’ business for fear of arrest as well.

The soldiers massed them all at gun point at the front of the building where agent Thanatos stood, all in black. “For treason against our cause you are all condemned to life in prison,” he paused to scowl at the scared assembly array before him, “take these people away from my sight.” That day began a new way of life, a much colder and dangerous one.

Before he could break eye contact Thanatos turned aside and began conversing with the officials at their post over watching the lobby. With a sigh of relief Daijon pressed on. His feet brought him past his usual exit point; today was Wednesday. His friends would be meeting for their midweek outing. It was a tradition. Although so much had changed, they held onto this night. In the lobby area of the transport center they gathered: Amy, Delwin, Ruth, and himself.

“Good we’re all here,” stated Daijon looking at the gathered group. Excited to go he asked, “Is everyone ready?” *Uhoh.* He padded his shirt. *Not there*. His hands cuffed down on his sides where his identification badge hung. “Whoo...”

His friends chuckled, “Looking for something there Daijon?” asked Delwin. Coming up to him, Delwin slid his hand around and plucked the pen perched on Daijon’s ear. This time Daijon smiled, “Well, that solves the uh, mystery of my lost pen…” he said as he took back the misplaced utensil.

“Just checking here. You know, to be sure,” Daijon fraised awkwardly, “Did you guys remember everything, especially your badges, before we head out?”

“Yes Mother,” Daijon turned to the voice, “We are all packed up and ready to go,” Amy teased as she strolled up to the group with Ruth and her best smirk of a smile. Daijon smiled back, he no longer minded being called Mother. His friends took up the name after Delwin suggested it because of his kind and caretaking nature. They then started on their journey lightly talking amongst one another about safe topics such as sports, and tech news.

It was still early but it took a while to travel anywhere nowadays. The streamlined trains remained the only transport option for common people since they banned personal vehicles; there were a great many things people sacrificed for the sake of the war. Boarding the next tram together they fell into the cramped seats as the government propaganda drawled on and the cameras continued to watch them. “Remember, always report suspicious activity...”

Friendly chatter and smiles filled the dinner hall…

…*If only it could always be like this*. Life once mirrored this now rare occasion, but time and hatred had stolen those days away.

When they could they helped at the local charity organizations together and gave monetarily from their paychecks. They were all good, but little good could they do in the grand scheme of things.

The way home was lonelier, one by one they stepped off at their own stops, Daijon last. The sun was still holding vestiges of the sky when the tram stopped and Amy stood, her hair catching the faint glimmers of the sun. She flashed him a searching smile before stepping off into the night. There was a time he would have liked nothing better than to accept her friendship on a higher level, even ask for her hand, but the days were far too uncertain, the war could change everything by tomorrow. G*oodbyes are never easy, and life is hardly ever welcoming*.

His stop came; as usual for Wednesday it was late, already the sun had set. He arrived at his apartment, unslung his bag onto the apartment floor, and took a short shower. He enjoyed the time with friends; they respected him past his awkwardness and were good people besides. *They must all be crazy* too.

It was about time for bed, but he could not seem to bestir himself from his seat at the window. There were never quiet nights here, but the city sometimes had its nice moments. The lights of the government sector shined in the distance, noting the constant work going on there. The business sector where commerce, shopping, and trades happened during the day encircled the center. Some of the skyscrapers looked really nice from here, even covered in a bit of haze. Further out from the city center were the homes and apartments that made up the residential areas; this was where he had chosen to live. It was a little more peaceful here, and his neighborhood was better kept than most, at least here things felt at peace.

That was when he saw the sleek black cars pull up across the street. *Oh knickers*. His breath caught in his throat as men emerged from the government vehicles. The peace of the neighborhood was broken under heavy force plate that battered down the neighbor’s door. He had flicked his reading lamp off. *Best not to draw attention to myself*. Daijon didn’t have to sit in mute fear long before he saw them, Astrea, and Zaccheus. They already had the covers over their faces as they were half walked, half dragged outside to their waiting pens. For many good people, the black of the hoods and the dark of the night were the last things they experienced. *They are innocent.* He looked away from the scene at the window. It wasn’t until he heard the car doors’ curt closings that he knew the captors had muscled the couple inside and on their way to their lifetime imprisonment. They always came for them in the black of night, the good, the bad, and the innocent of all but a desire for peace. It was the first time he had ever seen this, everyone knew it went on. The vacant homes were testament enough of its occurrence.

He didn’t move. He hardly breathed in fear he would be heard and taken too. The sky and street were so dark; it was only with difficulty he could see the sleek cars withdrawing down the main road and onto the distant government square where all detainees ended up. They were gone, but he still sat there, stunned. Looking at the pale moon in the sky, the world felt bitterly sad and cold. He did nothing. *I could do nothing*.

# II

Daijon lay in his bed, eyes half open. His apartment in partial disarray, he had been feeling weighed down lately; even after he stopped reading the news his unease remained. Al*though you don’t see it, doesn’t mean it’s not happening*. No matter what he did, nothing could make up for that night. Nothing could erase it. And nothing could change the world from what it had become: a dark, twisted nightmare.

“**…*What if I told you, you could change the world?****”*

It was a nice thought. *Normal people like me can’t hope to change much*. Give to charity, volunteer time at organizations, smile and wave to brighten a stranger’s day. It was all so little, but he did it anyways*.* Staring up, eyes half closed, the thought saddened and sickened him. *There is always hope for a better day*. And hope he had, as his world faded and sleep took him where the world could not.

The world was so dark. He looked up to a haze filled sky where the sun or stars should have been shining, but there was only gloom to greet his gaze. That was when he heard the voice again. It was soothing and utterly final. “***Everything that will follow inevitably ends here…”*** Silence filled in a pause as he retook in his surroundings. *I must be in some sort of nightmare right now*. Rubble piled in large heaps everywhere, the remnants of inhabitation long ago turned to ruin. The light glistened from the skyscrapers and spread across the street filled with debris and demolished vehicles. *My home.*

***“...Unless…***” the voice came again. *Unless what*? The light continued its descent, playing shadows among the sad remains of humanity. *“****What if I told you, you could change the world?***” The voice was nearing him now. “***If you will accept its burden, I can provide you the power to counter the Darkness.***” The world dimmed for a moment and his nerves tightened.“***I know you think this is just a dream, but it is not. I show you the world to be.”*** He felt a wave of anxiety begging to ripple from his stomach. “***Wake up.****”*And then he felt it; his senses rushed back into him. He could feel the stiff air and smell its reek.**“*You carry a special light within you. So little possess the quality. The world needs a guardian once more. You can be a shield to defend the world of man and a sword to strike its dark oppressors.”***

*Dark oppressors? What does this all mean?* He felt sick. Another spasm coursed through him, this time bringing him to his knees. He looked around again. His throat felt dry and his voice squeaked when he first tried to use it. “Are you saying if I don’t the world will die?” *Or if I accept and fail*. He blinked, the light was waiting, almost expectant. “But, I am just a man.” He thought back to all his failures and wrongdoings; things he had done, things said, and those left unsaid. If he could, in this moment he knew he would go back to those moments and do them differently. He was frightened and the sense of dread and inevitability weighed on his conscience. He twisted away from the light, “I think you’re asking the wrong guy.” *If I’m supposed to be the hero of this story then we’re looking at a tragic ending*.

“***You do not yet understand***,” it said, “***but your choices will be made clear in the light of dawn.”*** The ethereal orb glowed a little brighter.“***The world needs you. I need you. There is so little hope left; I am all that remains of the light of this world.***” His senses intensified, and his head began to spin. An epic battle waged between good and evil forces. Worse yet, the good side faced defeat. *And then turned to ME for help.*

“***Daijon, I have been brought here at the appointed time to seek out, well you. You are a son of man. As it was foretold, only by man’s choice will this darkness be lifted.***” It bobbed again and moved out a little further from him. There was no sound here, no wind to wrest the silence. “***If you choose to walk this path it will require you to sacrifice...***” It paused, then started again faintly, as if it brought pain to say it, “…***everything…***” silence filled the void. *Everything is quite a lot*.

It all felt unreal. He pinched himself once. *Ouch*. Then several more times just to be sure. *Yep, definitely not one of my daydreams*. He let out a shudder, only now could he feel it becoming colder as his breath became visible in the still air. “***Time is not with us Daijon.***” The voice was hastened this time. “***The choice is and will always be yours to make,***” he could change the world, but what was this associated cost? The light above was becoming dimmer and more translucent. How many times had he wished for something better? How many times had he thought, “If I had but one wish, I would wish for a better world. Peace, food, happiness for all.” Shadows stirred beyond view of the light and the cold pressed close, only the light brought warmth. “***What if I told you, you could change the world?***”

*I would have said you were crazy*. But he knew better now. He was just as crazy, and the light’s presence provided him hope and it blossomed in the gloom of the shattered world. “I would give anything for a better tomorrow.” He was sure of it now, “For a day without tears, and hope without question.” If there was anything worth everything, it would be that. The circling sphere sounded joyful yet a little sad when it said, “***Good Champion, arise. There are hard days to come before Darkness can be defeated. You will be reborn in the light, and the light within you shall come forth. Together, I think we actually have a chance.***” The world felt bitter cold now, but warmth coursed within him. For once he felt certain in his intentions and what he meant to do. *I’m going to change the world*. His thoughts drifted as his vision faded out…

He woke abruptly with the feeling of a sudden drop and the crunch of wood. *The front door?* He tried to stand, but his body wracked him with pains. He struggled to rise from his sprawled position at the center of the room. Everything was in tatters; the wood looked as though it had been seared in certain spots and anything not heavy enough was strewn throughout the room. *What happened last night*? There was the sound of heavy footfalls against the wood floor going up the stairs.

He looked outside and saw that the world was awake and buzzing in the predawn gloom. He was putting all he had into movement, but his body would hardly obey, it felt like the world was on his shoulders. That was when the two doors to his bedroom exploded from their hinges and heavily armed men charged in, surrounding him. He wanted to hide in a corner, to be freaking out but all he could think of was the men’s armor, it was pitch black. *Not part of the military* *or police*.

The lead opened his visor. T*he eyes, they’re molten gold*. “You may not know who we are, but we know who you are, Champion.” His voice felt like ice and was full of malice. “Only, this time we were ready for you.” The air in the room stiffened, his hairs stood on edge and his heart beat fast, as though it knew it was enjoying its last run. “We are the darkness in man’s heart, we are the plagues, the droughts, the wars. We are the sins of this life, and we are many.” Their guns rose, leveling on him, he could not move. *If you choose to walk this path it will require you to sacrifice everything.* “This is our world now, and you don’t belong in it.” He saw the flash before he felt the bullet rip through him. That’s when the darkness swept in around him, it was so cold.

III

Only Hell could be so cold, then again, wasn’t he dead? He struggled against the claws and the grasping hands appearing out of the void like wisps out of thick fog. They were tugging him down, down into the depths, down into the waiting gloom below.That was when he felt light in him and soon felt it pour forth from his soul. The hands tried in vain to clasp on but were forced to recoil into the obscurity surrounding him with shrieks of hate and fear. A feeling of exhaustion overcame him, his vision blurred but he could just make out a ball of light descending to him from above.

“…Where am I?” *My head hurts and my muscles ache, and I don’t feel like getting up, it must be Monday*. The wave of nausea passed and his eyes finally began to focus. Everything was white, then sun broke through the veil and he could see the sky and the cloud he laid upon. Everything gradually returned as though he was being sown together piece by piece*.* “***Though you were dead, you have been risen.***”The ball of light appeared before him now, “***Death has been put underfoot for you. Now, life and power have been given to you.***” Rolling onto his side and then standing up he began to feel again. In tingles at first, the sensations built up until they streamed through the whole of his body. He could feel a burning fire in his chest, warm and strong. He looked down at the steadily increasing pulse of light from his chest. Each beat brought strength and substance to his being. Then he breathed, the air was invigorating and clean.

He looked to the ball of light, his friend, and watched as their two lights beat as one. “So…” he said looking around and feeling the warm sun against his skin, “we’re about change the world huh?” Everything was clear now; he knew his path and had the strength to follow it. Willing himself into the air he stretched his new found powers, examining the depths of his being. With a thought, silvery plate armor materialized over his body of a substance unknown to existence. *Level up…* His friend flitted about him, content to let him revel in this new found hope.

He explored deeper into his new being and found the song of existence coursing around him, it was there he could experience the emotions of the world, as though they were a part of him. Creation was in turmoil; he could sense the despair and fear permeating the souls of man. There was anger too, anger for revenge and anger for justice. He pushed past these feelings, searching deeper into the harmony and found it there. *Hope*. There still some good in this world and strength enough to save it from darkness. Alone, he knew, light would fail. It would be up to the good of individuals to bear the torches and bring forth the fiery light of hope to kindle the hearts of all humanity to a burning fire.

This coming struggle would not be against flesh and blood but the rulers, authorities, and powers of the Darkness. “***Your way has been set, when you are ready, you can again enter forth into the world anew as its Champion.***” He breathed the fresh air once again, he was ready. “Let’s do this, I am ready… You’ll be there too,” he focused on his companion, “won’t you?” The light came to him then, radiating love and hope with each of its pulses. “***Wherever love and hope resides, so too will I… Make ready Champion.***” He steeled himself as the sky parted and he found himself diving into a channel of vast energy directing him towards home.

The Earth began to rumble, the buildings did not shake and the seas did not toss but there was power in the air. Darkness trembled and fled into the shadows as the skies lightened as though a bright star was crashing to the surface. Thunder cracked through the atmosphere as he appeared amidst the clouds. There was so much to do, so many things to right. *Where to begin?* He situated his bearings; he was just outside the bounds of the city he once lived.  *The perfect place to start.* He could see his old home, his neighborhood, his workplace. Then he saw the city center and the government buildings. With his extended senses, he could hear the sirens begin to wail. The Darkness was already forming to stop him and he had only just arrived. He eyed the lockup center and remembered Zaccheus and Astrea and all the other innocents. In the end, it would be up to people to choose for themselves to take up the light and fight to take back the world from the clutches of Darkness. He knew then exactly where to begin as he propelled off toward the city with hope and strength resting itself within him like a second armor. *And so it begins.*