

When Daniel wakes up, he has zero clue where he is. He's on a reddish cliff near some sort of sea or ocean, judging by the offending odor of salt. The first thing his eyes are greeted with is the blinding light of the sun, which shines directly on top of his body. The sound of the crashing waves hums from below. Daniel sits up and looks around. On this vast empty cliff, only one scene stands out: A bonfire and two logs. Next to the bonfire is a young-looking, bald-faced medieval vagabond in flower-printed rags with a bindle laying on the log he's sitting on. A skinny white dog is sitting next to him, wagging its tail and panting.

Daniel, out of ideas on what to do next, shrugs and approaches the man. As Daniel gets closer, the vagabond's dog yips happily at Daniel. He turns around to look at the young boy.

"Hello there," the vagabond says in a calm and welcoming voice, not breaking his smile. He gestures toward the empty log. "Have a seat."

Daniel hesitantly sits on the log across from him. The vagabond is peeling an apple with a dagger, humming a tune.

"What is your name, young lad?"

"Daniel," He says. "Who're you?"

"Me? I'm just a simple Fool, wandering this globe in search of life's purpose. I guess you could call me The Fool. And my furry confidant here is Zero."

"Where are we?"

"I know not. I seldom stay in the same place for long. I like to keep my feet moving," The Fool responds, kneeling down to scratch his dog's ears. "My friend here and I always keep an eye out for people. You have to be very careful who you meet out here, though. Some people are not as kind and trusting as others."

The Fool tosses his naked apple toward Daniel. Daniel catches it.

“Thanks.” He nods.

“Usually I like to roast the apples I eat. It gives them a nice, savory texture. But given your sudden arrival, I’ve not had time to. And yet, it is also rude to leave your guest starving.”

“It’s okay. I eat apples with the skin, anyway.”

The Fool chuckles. A short silence follows, interrupted by the crackling fire and the crashing waves.

“I have but one piece of wisdom to share with you, Daniel,” The Fool speaks. Daniel looks up at him, waiting for his words. “But first, I must inquire. What matters the most to you?”

Daniel shrugs, taking a bite out of his beige apple. “Honestly, I just need friends or something. There’s this girl I was talking to at school. She’s pretty cute. I think she’s pretty into me.”

“So you desire something you and only you will benefit from?”

“Is there something wrong with that?” Daniel asks between munches.

“No. In fact, it is human nature to think of oneself before others. It is what grants us our instinct and ability to survive for so long.”

“So what do you want to tell me?”

“Heed now what I have to say. Soon, your own adventure will begin, and the peace you have enjoyed for fourteen years will vanish. There is no avoiding it.”

Daniel is about to take another bite out of the apple, but moves it away from his mouth. “Wait, what do you mean by that? Is the world ending or something?”

“I cannot disclose the details of your journey. It is yours to discover. The only advice I have to bestow upon you is to know that no matter how bleak the future may be, it is never set in stone. Have faith the world can be changed, face the ominous future with your own unique

outlook. And finally, a decision is only wrong when it is made without conviction. Make every decision with courage and confidence, but also know why you made that choice. “

Daniel scratches his head. “I still don’t get it.”

“You will with time, friend. You will with time,” The Fool cryptically smiles. A few more moments of silence pass between the two. The Fool and his dog look over at the sun, which is now sunken halfway into the west horizon. “Dusk already?” He stands up and picks up his bindle. He looks down at his dog. “Come on, Zero. Let us continue our journey.”

Daniel stands up and runs after The Fool and Zero. The Fool picks a random flower from a patch and holds it in his left hand. They both go over to the cliff’s edge, the sound of the waves crashing against the jagged cape rocks. “Wait, I have questions!”

“You shall find your answers to them in the coming weeks.”

“Will I ever see you again?”

The Fool smirks mischievously. “We both will be closer to you than you think,” Both The Fool and Zero edge closer to the edge of the cliff, the breeze grazing against The Fool’s rags and bindle. “Farewell and remember: If all else fails, simply trust your instincts!”

The Fool spreads his arms out and leans backward, falling into the white foamy sea. Zero yips at Daniel one more time before leaping after his owner. Daniel runs over to the edge of the cliff and lowers himself onto all fours. Peering over the cliff’s edge, neither The Fool nor Zero are anywhere to be seen.

A surge of a cold, wet sensation stabs itself into Daniel’s body. His lungs hack as they try to expel any water that may have entered his lungs. Coming to, he’s in the same alleyway where

Eliza bashed his head with an ice hammer. A firefighter holding a dripping bucket is towering over him.

“Hey, young man. You alright?” The firefighter asks, offering a helping hand. Daniel grabs his hand and lifts himself off the ground. The world around him spins, the headache returning once more. He clutches his forehead and closes his eyes.

“Ow...”

“Hey, take it easy. A strike to the head like that probably gave you a nasty concussion,” He cautions. The firefighter turns to look at a fallen sign lying on the ground. It came from the top of one of the buildings. “I kept saying they should’ve secured that sign before someone got hurt.”

Daniel looks over to where the firefighter is looking. The neon sign has small ice crystals around it. The metal poles holding the sign up have unnaturally jagged edges, as if the ice snapped the sign off.

“Listen, why don’t you head home? Kids like you shouldn’t be out in dark alleys, especially once it gets dark. Lotsa crazies out there these days.”

“Thank you.” Daniel says simply before dusting himself off and heading back home.