

CHAPTER 18

As Marvin stepped away, the only thought remaining was his own fate.

The sadness engine had been running on its own for several hours, but even then, it wasn't *actually* doing its job. Until some bold soul pulls the lever, an "emotional" engine - be it sadness, happiness, or some other thing - will do no more than take up space.

Marvin, who was without a doubt a very bold man, did precisely that; he pulled the lever. And only fifty years before, he was convinced that this was just about the worst action any person could take. It probably *was*, too.

The closets watched. They couldn't believe what they were seeing.

Marvin wanted very badly to justify his actions, but at that point, such a thing was not possible. He wasn't fueled by logic, he didn't have a plan, and he wasn't happy with himself. The anger, unfortunately, continued to drive him, whether or not he really wished for it to.

It was either his *worst* nightmare, or his *best* nightmare. Either way, it was still a nightmare.

The sadness had been unleashed into the world. While this was probably where it belonged all along, there was definitely nothing good about what was happening. The people who otherwise would have managed to escape several difficult situations would suddenly find themselves unable to do so anymore. Near death experiences would turn into death experiences. All of this was going to happen, and there was no way to escape it.

This felt like a good time to cry, but it was far too late for that. Marvin had enough crying. He wasn't going to take any more of this.

He picked up the notebook that he had written in earlier from the table next to him, as well as the strangest little pen you could visualize (it was very cute - and pink). The words were flowing through his head at an overwhelming pace, he needed to jot them down as soon as possible. They were almost visible, these words; the pen took them in groups and spit them out in predictable patterns on the paper. That is to say, Marvin wrote down what was on his mind.

On his small piece of paper was the following sentence:

"You finally got what you wanted."

He wanted to write more, but there wouldn't have been a use. These words meant nothing in reality, they were simply the thoughts of a man who nobody knew anymore.

But this would only remain true until the camera fed them. Those hungry cowards; opening closets, running up stairs like it's no problem, thinking that everything was okay. They had nothing better to do than document the life of an old man that no longer mattered.

But he realized, at that moment, that the hungry were not completely evil inside. In fact, they were probably not evil *at all*. Like, not even in the *least*.

Marvin had figured out that there was an undeniable truth here, hiding behind the system and everything else that appeared to be reality: *the hungry were never fed*. The hungry only collected the food, which could have been anything from evidence to opinions to thought processes (usually secretive), giving it directly to the master. If they were truly evil, manipulative, and cunning, then they would not be hungry at all. They would most definitely be feasting upon twenty new meals every second of their lives.

But no. That didn't happen. Only one person was fed, and the rest followed.

The largest risk, worse than anything else, would have been for the master to die, or to go missing. The only choice in that kind of situation would be for somebody to come to the rescue.

As much sense as this all made, Marvin didn't want to believe it. He threw himself at every wall, stomping on the floor, screaming at the closets. But the screams soon turned to whispers in the dark, as his fit of anger destroyed every last light bulb in the basement.

"You have to believe me," Marvin said, tears nearly *pouring* from his eyes. He continued to stare directly at the closet door, wishing for all of it to end. "I didn't mean for it to happen. There are too many bad people. There are too many."

The closet didn't respond.

"I think the engine has worked," he said.

He lied there for the next half hour, but he didn't calm down. It only got increasingly worse.

The darkness, through time, would sink into every hole, and every region of the building. There were no hiding places. There were no happy corners. Every object around him was filling with anger.

The walls were angry. The closets were angry. The sadness engine was angry. The books in the library were angry.

Marvin stood up. He didn't feel like things were happening anymore. However, he felt the anger - he felt it build up inside of him, in a way that he never before had experienced. If he wanted to, he could have murdered somebody - and, in fact, that's exactly what he wanted to do at that moment.

But it wasn't just anybody that he wanted to murder. He wanted only one person to be dead - the center of all the evil in the world. Not the hungry ones; they were no longer a problem. They probably were *never* a problem, in fact.

He was ready to break his promise to himself. If there was indeed time left - if outside of those walls was not an army of hungry men and woman waiting to eat, then it was time to leave the building once again, and into a world where nothing was certain.

Of course. There was nothing left to lose.

"We're going to have fun tomorrow, Care," she said.

Care's mom was in her best mood; there was nothing left in the entire world to get her down. She almost felt *powerful*. Her self esteem never reached such a level before in her life - but it felt very natural, like it couldn't be taken away.

She cleaned up the shattered remains of the light bulb with an awkward - and mildly terrifying - smile. The glass smiled back at her.

"What are we doing?" Care asked. Her mother stood up.

"Fixing up the house," she said. "And the ceiling needs to be painted. We'll do that first."

Care whined.

"I know, this is exciting," her mother continued, placing the lamp back on the table. "I've got all the paint we'll need in the closet - fifteen buckets of it. Belonged to my daddy back in his day."

Essentially, nothing had been accomplished here. Certainly a situation like this would have taught the world a lesson - and if not the world, then it would have at *least* taught Care's mother to keep the damn windows closed. But, no, this didn't happen. The windows were just as wide open as they had been for the last week, and her mother didn't seem to take any notice of this fact. However, even if she *had* taken notice, it probably wouldn't have registered as a problem to her.

Care's mother laughed with excitement. Her eyes almost burst straight out of her head, never to hit the ground; only to travel forward, retaining every ounce of dignity left in her body, around the earth hundreds of thousands of times, until the universe finally shattered into as many peices as there were broken dreams. But those broken dreams didn't matter anymore. They didn't even exist.

It didn't make any difference to Care, anyway. She was in a maddening position. It felt almost like everybody was against her.

She sat down next to the window, in a small wooden chair, hoping for some time to think. Her mother turned around and took notice immediately.

"Care, sweetie, that's my chair," she said. "If you want to sit down, go to your room."

"My room is dumb," Care replied.

Her mother was too busy not listening. She reached for the front door and opened it, letting in the light and soaking it all in, waiting to grow in size just as would always happen in her happiest dreams.

The world was inside of her. It was never going to leave.

This peaceful silence, as great as it was, did not last for very long. But Care's mother was willing to enjoy it while it lasted. This silence - it was her life's dream.

It continued for the next few seconds.

A sudden gust of wind swept through the house, knocking over everything it could lay its hands on. Every object that wasn't lucky enough to be embedded in some other, heavier object, was subjected to the cold hard floor and broke into several horrifyingly sharp pieces. It lasted for about half of a minute, increasing in strength gradually until all one could hear was the constant shattering and the unbearable noise. The windows were broken, and the shards of glass wept quietly, having been separated after all of those pleasant years.

Care covered her ears. Her mother simply stood there, eyes wide open, taking all of it in. It was still silence, to her. Her concept of "noise" was completely different than this.

This eruption of sound and wind - having decidedly accomplished its goal - came to an abrupt stop, taking the color with it. There was a sense of life, only seconds earlier. A feeling of presence. A reason to live. But this had been taken away - leaving behind only a stale taste in the air.

The noise had gone off into the distance, looking for more. This would continue for miles and miles to come.

While Care's mother wasn't *happy* about this odd occurrence, it didn't seem like something to be sad about. She felt drained, but in a relieving way.

"Care," she began, staring forward into the distance. "Are you still there?"

Her daughter's response was far from immediate. There were some obvious problems with what had just happened, and talking didn't feel like the correct reaction.

"Yes," Care answered.

"Go to bed," her mother said, still trapped in her own world. "I'm leaving for the night."

"Where are you going?"

"The store. I'm getting a new lamp."

She ran outside and closed the door. The house returned to its dark state.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

For a very brief moment, the air was travelling at extremely peculiar speeds. The color had vanished before my very eyes, soon after.

If this had happened only two days ago, the floor would most certainly have been covered with cameras. Precious, precious cameras. But Tapers was as good as gone, at this point, as were the cameras themselves. They were probably going to be given away, or destroyed.

Pictures began to appear in my head - cameras being launched into the air, crowds cheering.

But no, those cameras were definitely *not* on the floor. In fact, no real damage had really been done. Sure, the door had broken off, and the windows shattered into possibly thousands of little sharp pieces, but those were all replacable objects. Those tapers, however, were *never* going to come back.

"I kind of like it," the clerk said. "Those colors were getting in the way. The world seems to be getting better and better as the days go by, eh?"

"Nice," I said, beginning to relax again. "Sometimes I wish I could think like you do."

"Do you not feel the same?"

The simple act of thinking brought my anger back up. Hiding from it was useless; it always came back stronger.

"It's all a lost cause," I said. "Life in general, really. I brought her daughter back, and all she gave me was a door to the face."

"Oh, we're talking about *people* now," he said, losing interest. He yawned. "Weren't you supposed to *kill* that kid? I gave you a drawing and everything."

"I don't kill people," I said.

"Well, why the hell *not*?"

The world felt like it was breaking to pieces. I had nothing left to grasp to, nothing to comprehend. At any second, I could have slipped through the floor and vanished. It would have felt completely natural, like a simple cause and effect kind of thing. And nobody could save me.

This wasn't anything new. It just felt stronger.

"I would need a very good reason," I replied. This conversation didn't feel real anymore.

"*Good reason*?" he said, nearly giggling. "That's easy stuff."

"Is it?"

He took a quick glance outside of the building, through the window. His face lit up with excitement.

"Oh, indeed. Hey, look out there," he began, pointing out the window. "How cute. You'll get a nice hoot out of this, I tell you."

I turned around and peeked outside. It didn't take long for my body to begin shaking uncontrollably.

The world could have brought me pleasure; it could have given me luck. It could have pushed me in the right direction, placing a map in my hands. Not a detailed map necessarily - a simple path would have been quite enough. A line, really. Drawn lightly in pencil. That's all that I could have asked for.

But none of that - I repeat, *none* of that - was given to me. Instead, I was given this.

Beyond those shattered windows was a man and a woman, dancing on the sidewalk. One of them, being the love of my life - my ex-wife. Not once, in the time I had known her, did she look as happy as she did at this moment. It gave me a false sense of excitement, as I had dreamt for many years of a day like this. But all of this energy, all of this cheer, was quickly negated. Her happiness was not my doing.

The man with which she danced was not a friend of mine. I had not imagined, even for a second, that this would have happened. But there was really nothing left to do but accept it. This man, wearing his usual metal clothing and his rock-hard tie, was none other than Hil himself.

"Funny, huh?" the Tapers clerk said. "I've never seen a woman dancing with *herself* before. Either that, or an imaginary friend. Brings back memories."

The shaking would not stop.

"Anyway," he continued, completely unaware of my reaction. "You're probably right. I can't think of any reasons you would have for killing a child."

Without thinking, I slammed my fist on the desk.

"Oh," I said, coming to a complete halt. My entire body had paused, almost. "I'm very happy for you, to have come to that incredible conclusion."

I had lost all of my ability to blink. But even though my eyes stung, it didn't feel like a problem. It was just another uncomfortable feeling, among thousands.

"Well, me too," he said. "I suppose so, at least."

"You're wrong, though," I continued, still watching the performance on the sidewalk. "Because I *do*, at this point in time, have a legitimate reason for wanting to commit such an act."

"Oh? Since when?"

"Since just a minute ago," I replied. "Anyway, I'm going now. Important business to attend to. Have a spectacular life."

If the door wasn't already on the other side of the room, I would have probably pulled it off myself in anger as I left the building. Neither Hil nor his *new lover* noticed me outside of the store, but I didn't want them to. They were far too busy adoring each other, and I didn't want to disrupt that.

I began the short walk to my ex-wife's house. Ideas rushed through my head, one after the other, of what my next act would be. I certainly had a weapon, and the anger necessary to do somethingâ€¦ drastic.

It felt pretty good. All of my worries were long gone. I could have done *anything* without feeling the slightest bit of guilt.

The world felt kind of ghostly. All color was gone, human presence was almost gone, the feeling of familiarity was gone. While I would have voluntarily ventured into this dark new world myself, I was being pulled in anyway, being forced to do something that I would have been happy to do.

The houses continued to stare down at me, showing off their superiority. I was surrounded.

There's a reason for me saying that "human presence was *almost* gone." I knew that somebody was behind me, but I didn't want to figure out who it was. The footsteps were pretty loud and obvious, and they were giving me a very uneasy feeling. Somebody was clearly following me.

I turned around.

Yes, there was indeed a person there. Looked very familiar.

"Hey!" I said.

He didn't stop. I could tell that he wasn't actually walking toward me - his eyes were not pointed in my direction. I walked out of the way, as he would eventually catch up to me. Getting in his way didn't feel like the best choice.

As he passed by, it all came back to me. This was the same old man that I saw earlier - Hil's replacement. This realization shocked me. He was very determined, and while he seemed to recognize me, I was apparently not his target.

"Hey you," I said, still trying to get his attention. "What are you doing?"

He looked at me briefly, only to grunt and continue walking. As I was obviously not his target - at least not at this moment - only one possibility remained.

A smile formed on my face.

"Actually," I began. He was in front of me at this point. "I think I know what you want, old man."

He was only half listening.

"Honestly, we have similar goals," I continued, catching up to him. The man looked back at me; I had gained his attention, at last.

"Hm," he said. "Similar goals?"

"And I'm willing to help," I replied, looking as honest and kind as I could. It felt like this moment was the entire reason for my existence. "May I, by any chance at all, interest you in an axe?"