

## CHAPTER 1

Sitting close to an old school building, quietly entertaining itself, was a bench. While the school next to it seemed from the outside like it hadn't been cleaned in ages, this bench was perfect.

It would be a struggle to sit on, most of the time. There was a high demand for clean benches, usually hundreds of exhausted blobs hobbling forward at any given moment, and yet only one seat. To pass by this bench as it lied empty was a lucky sign for anybody.

At this moment, as was true for the majority of the day, the bench was occupied.

On one side was a small, thin man. I don't actually know who this was, and I frankly don't think it's a matter of any person's concern. On the other side, an older man (late sixties, perhaps) with a considerably heavy forehead sat; his name was Marvin Mill. Not a particularly happy person, but his dreams kept him going.

His eyes, always wide open, moved back and forth. He was always concentrating on two or three distinct things, paying full attention to all of them and only limited by the speed of his eyeballs.

Most of his attention was paid on the school behind him. It was almost the end of the school day, or so his watch was claiming. He knew this from waiting in roughly the same spot every day, regardless of health or mood. This time, however, he had the bench. He could relax for a change, and watch the children.

Marvin was tired, as per usual; he fought hard to retain his consciousness, overwhelmed by the comfort of the one decent seat in the town. He couldn't let himself fall asleep, at least not on this particular day. Not that it was any different than the day before, but it was always worth it, and all days could have potentially been wonderful in his life.

He had always enjoyed watching the children, as they sprang out of the building and into their bright, sparkling buses. Buses which, due to this brightness, would reflect light into his eyes, preventing him from watching the children from that point forward. Damn those buses. They served no purpose in his mind but to separate him from his goals.

However, some of them didn't ride the buses, and instead traveled by foot. This was the extraordinary part. No light, nothing, just pure children. How wonderful. For this man, there was but one reason for living, and it was this.

He could hear the bell from where he sat. It was loud, and he was thankful for that. There was a lot to be thankful for, on this day.

But by now, the buses had pulled up by the school, preventing him from seeing much further. His head turned away. Soon there would

be children in front of him, he thought to himself. His fingers were crossed.

One child came into view. Then another. Yet another.

He sat back, moving his eyeballs back and forth, trying to concentrate on all of them. A few looked back, reacting to his glance by walking away a little faster. They recognized him from every other day; it was a mystery to them why his eyes would settle on their bodies so silently and peacefully. They imagined his thoughts, wondering to themselves what could be so intriguing about a small group of seven to eight year old children. The speed at which they walked away was mostly proportional to the inappropriateness of these imagined thoughts.

Marvin's ears were ready, as they often were.

Behind one group of kids was a small girl, considerably shorter than the others, but decidedly in the same age group. The small group in front of her was talking loudly and quite obnoxiously, laughing at what was probably something silly. This girl behind them, though, wasn't talking at all.

Marvin didn't appreciate this silence. It didn't fit.

That group of six or seven kids, still enjoying themselves, began to walk a notch faster. The little girl behind them didn't do this; in fact, the opposite happened. She walked slower, and her head turned steadily toward the old man.

At the sight of this, something strange happened. The man's eyes miraculously stopped moving.

For the first time in years, he was concentrating on one thing. One single thing in this entire world. Not two, not three, not four, and certainly not five, a number that he had always despised.

The girl came to a full stop.

Marvin's heart was beating faster than it had for years, and his mouth made a closer shape to a smile than ever before. He would always appear very depressed, before this moment. Marvin's concentration increased, at a time where such a thing felt impossible. He was wrong.

Marvin stood up as quickly as he could. He was ready for a hug; a massive one, the best hug of his life. He stepped forward, toward the young girl, and looked down in his happiest face - ready to take her into his world, his planet of love, his hideout of happiness. He reached forward to pull her inside.

But the girl - afraid of what this behavior meant - screamed and ran away, leaving Marvin to stand in silence.

He looked down at the ground for a while, where the girl had once stood, but he soon moved his eyes back up. They began moving

back and forth at the same speed as before, and his concentration had been lost.

It took a while for Marvin to accept this. The happiness could not possibly leave, it needed a home. But, regardless, it was slowly drifting away, as if it were leaving an old man's home, embarrassed that it had knocked on the wrong door. And, of course, that man was a hopeless loser, waiting for that attention for years and begging for it not to go away.

He looked back and realized that another man had already taken his seat on the bench. Then he cried, just as he would cry every single day, at this same exact time.

"Well?" the young man asked.

"I don't like this one," I told him.

He was standing behind a desk. At least twelve million video cameras sat behind him, and they all looked just a little bit different from the rest. Printed in clear letters on each of them was the word "Taper." It referred to some made-up name for a camera, as well as the store's name, "Tapers."

"So, you want a better one?" he asked. "Because if that's the case, look for yourself. I'm a tad busy."

"This one looks good, though. I just don't like it." I responded. "Do you have a better one that looks exactly the same?"

He scratched his head, then turned around and scanned the area behind him for a matching camera. A few seconds later, he turned back around, this time with a sarcastic smile.

"Sorry, but I'm only here for three more hours, not three more years," he said with a smirk.

"Could you try harder? This is important to me."

"Well, see," he began. "I've got three more hours here, before I go home."

"Home? I'm sure you have nothing to attend to there."

"Well, yeah, I do."

"What, do you need to feed a fish or something?"

"I have a family, actually."

"Multiple fishes?"

"No, they'reâ€¦"

"You don't understand," I told him. "This is important business. And I don't think anybody honestly cares about these fishes of yours. Letting them starve for one night will not bring life to a screeching halt. However, if I don't get my hands on a decent camera, then the likelihood of that happening will suddenly begin to increase."

The man behind the desk looked down, assessing the situation. He turned around again, took another look at the wall of cameras, then went back to staring down at his desk.

"Shouldn't be difficult to pick it out yourself," he said, pointing in my direction.

I thought about this suggestion. It made enough sense to be worth giving a shot.

"Hm," I began. "You're ticking me off, I've got to admit. But, okay."

He sighed, and sat down in the seat below him.

I looked over at the cameras, all sitting peacefully with each other, despite their differences. There were black ones, green ones, magical ones, inside-out ones - all together in one store. It was amazing. Some of them were the strangest things I've laid my eyes on, and it didn't even matter to them. Nothing mattered.

If only people got along in this way, I would think to myself.

Tapers was full of wonders like this. Every time I stopped by, I would notice something interesting about the store. Something that could apply to real-life situations. You could tell that these were symbolic on purpose, and that the owners of this store were intelligent, deep people with clear goals - perhaps not even related to cameras at all.

I looked further down, and saw exactly what I wanted. The perfect camera - almost identical to the one I was holding in my hand. Looking back and forth between them, I was sure of this.

"There! Yes, I love it," I shouted, pointing down at the camera.

He picked it up and put it on the desk. I placed my own camera on the desk for comparison.

"This is the same exact same camera," he said.

"But it isn't. Look at the label, you silly man."

He turned the new camera around. On the label was, like every single camera in the store, "Taper" in large letters - but below that was another word, that did not appear to be printed anywhere on the older one.

"Waterproof."

The man behind the desk continued to look down at the camera. He turned his head over to the window. It was pouring rain like mad.

"Oh," he said.

"Yeah," I replied. "My other one is broken, as of twenty minutes ago."

After having bought the camera, I threw the other into a nearby garbage can and ran to the door.

"Sir," he said.

There was silence.

"Please, sir," he repeated. "I don't appreciate you placing that camera in there. You see - that's my personal garbage can."

I left the store before he could finish.

My precious camera immediately became soaking wet. This time, it was not a problem. People were walking all about, unsuspecting, and I was about to enjoy myself. I had always loved rain; there was something about being wet that felt like fun. And combined with my greatest hobby - albeit a new one, as I only started a few weeks earlier - it was fantastic.

My head was filled with ideas, but none of them were good enough for this. They would have disqualified me anyway, being "planned" ideas. I welcomed the limitations, though; they were exciting.

I thought about the possibilities. Perhaps I could film hundreds of tiny clips, and combine them to create the illusion that something else was happening. Though, that wouldn't have been allowed either. The idea was, unfortunately, for me to film something "real."

The problem was that "real" was the opposite of "fun," and I perceived that as an entirely objective thing. You couldn't have both at the same time, it was unthinkable in my mind. For some reason, I was up to the challenge regardless.

I began filming absolutely nothing. People walking on the sidewalk, cars passing by, a dog or two if I was lucky. Sometimes a few of those dogs would be wearing hats, but unfortunately that didn't happen this time. I almost felt the urge to ask somebody if they would dance for me.

I turned to the left and looked into the distance. Somebody was coming - I pointed my camera into that direction and stepped away.

As this person came closer, I could see her more clearly. I could tell that it was a female, but nothing else yet. To entertain myself, I built up some suspense.

Uh-oh. Who could this be! Golly, this will be great. And what will happen when she gets here? Murder? Let's find out!

This felt pretty depressing and pathetic, but I kept at it. Maybe I could jump out and scare her? No, that's stupid, I thought. There wasn't much time left, and this was getting less "suspenseful" by the moment.

At that point, I could see her well. It was a small child; nobody that I should have been messing with. But I kept the camera on her, and even when she passed me, I continued to follow. I wondered where she was going, and thought that maybe, if I was very lucky, it would be somewhere amazing.

She looked back for a second. I tried to act casual, but it was quite obvious that I was following her. She began to run. Realizing this, I ran as well.

This continued for a solid thirty seconds - suddenly, as she was running, she disappeared. Not like magic or anything, it was my own fault for momentarily looking away. But she was gone, and I was left standing there, confused. It was very frustrating.

However, I caught a short glimpse of her on my fabulous taper. She was running into a house - the one to the right of me - and closing the door. Seemed like I scared her a bit; this made me feel guilty. I realized what happened - she was walking home this whole time. Nothing interesting like I thought. How disappointing.

Well, maybe it was disappointing to my the audience of my "movie," but it wasn't quite as boring to me. I walked to the house and took a nice look at it. Very familiar.

It was small, just as I remembered it. Seemed like it was kept clean for all of those years, as well - though, I hadn't bothered to peek inside, so that was yet to be confirmed. But it was neat to look at. It seemed pretty odd to me that I never even bothered to pay a visit after all of that time, but there I was. Things hadn't really changed.

Clearly, the little girl lived in this house. That realization kind of shocked me, and it took more than a few minutes to accept it as true.

Very strange. Apparently, that was my daughter.

"Alright, then," I said. "Okay, then."

I didn't really mean to say that out loud, in the open, but it sort of came out. Alright, then. Okay, then. That's a perfect thing to say in this situation. It just doesn't matter anymore, is what that implies. Okay, then. I accept this. Alright, then.

I walked home, without a thought in my mind except for "okay, then. Alright, then. Okay, alright."