

### The Shadow

“Tick... tick... tick...” Empty sounds of the creation went on and on. It was an odd invention, as it had gears in places that don’t move, pipes in areas with no need for ventilation, and lenses in spots where you couldn’t see within. It wobbled around the desk for a while before falling on its side in helplessness. A huge calloused hand picked up this small, gentle form...and threw it in the pile.

This pile loomed over everything else in the small hut that contained it. It was filled with little whirring machinery, broken parts, and washed out materials. Furniture in the small space seemed to situate itself all around the mass, almost as if the pile was something to be avoided. Stuck to the wooden walls were drawings and sketches of creations that were all crossed out. A mural created from these sketches stretched on to lead to a desk. The owner of the abode sat at this very desk, poking at an entirely new set of wheels and knobs.

This man was a tall, gangly fellow. He had wisps of white hair that matched his full beard in its silvery tone, and startling bright blue eyes that were visible even in dim light. His attire was a dark cloak over a simple white tunic that has been darkened in soot and ash.

Suddenly, a small clocklike figure from within the mass of gadgets began screeching, breaking the man’s concentration. He begrudgingly stood from his desk and proceeded to head outside.

When the man opened the door, he saw the same sight he did every day. The foliage surrounding his house nearly tripped him as he took a step, as it had crawled its way into the walls of his hut and all over the path. The walls of the house were molding and wet, while the stones of the stairs nearly crumbled when the man walked down them. A path leading to the stairs was a dirt road that was so dry, every step that the man made formed a new crack in it. Outside the path was a deep and dense forest that stretched on for miles and miles.

The man trod down this path, wary of the dangers that lurked outside it. The forest itself was gloomy and hard to see. Had he decided to take even a step off the path, he could have put his life in jeopardy to whatever was living in the forest.

Eventually, the man approached a familiar river. It tended to wash up unwanted things from upstream, which the man would collect in order to tinker some more with his inventions. He began taking up items that seemed useful to him, and let the rest continue its way down the river. His hands were about halfway full with parts when he noticed a large, looming shadow appearing from up the creek.

As the item came into view, the man saw it was a small, black basket with a dark blue blanket on top. He carefully picked up the basket from the water, and was surprised it felt

almost weightless. The basket was unlabeled, nor did it have any sort of distinctive features about it. The man slowly lifted the blue blanket and peeked within.

When he looked inside, a small head of black hair popped out. Inside was an infant that looked to be about 2 years old. The man could barely make out the child's face in the dim lighting, as it was just as dark as the shadows around them. The child didn't cry at the sight of the man, and instead stared at him the same way he was staring at the child.

The man looked back and forth in confusion. Why did this child appear in the river? The man sighed. When he did, the child imitated his sigh. Curious, the man raised his hand and waved at the baby. The infant raised its tiny fist and mirrored the gesture back at the man. Whatever facial expression, movement or gesture that the man did, the child would copy almost exactly, almost as if it were a shadow.

The man pondered the choices that would have to be made. He could either keep the child and raise it in order for it to have a chance of survival, or leave it to continue going downstream to who knows where. The man certainly didn't, so he picked up the basket and started on his way back home.

For several years to come, the shadow lived with the man. With the child, the man found companionship that was unfamiliar yet comforting at the same time. He quickly discovered that his hut didn't have the proper living arrangements to raise a child. The man began to fix this by the only way he knew how - use the materials from his pile to build a life for the shadow.

He found some broken down wood and shredded wool to build a bed for the infant to sleep in. While it looked just as rustic and flaky as the furniture already in the hut, it was soft and wouldn't hurt the child. After he had built it, he felt a strange feeling of accomplishment that he had never felt after building a creation. He no longer felt like what he created was a failure, and had no desire to throw it away. From then on, he began building more and more, and found greater meaning when he built for the shadow instead of himself.

As the child grew, the man taught it all about the world and the wonders that were found outside the little hut. He taught it what the trees were, where the creek led to, and the skies that were above everything. When he wasn't teaching, he was improving on inventions and creating more practical needs to give the child a better life.

One winter, a particularly fierce blizzard raged on for months without stopping. The man saw the shadow shivering from the cold and almost appeared to be flickering in and out of sight. There was no real way for the man to light a fire inside the hut without destroying everything within, and there wasn't a way to light a fire on the cold snow outside.

At first, he attempted to create a container that could carry the fire around. However, it only acted as a light source, as it was too small to provide much warmth. All it did was make the shadow flicker in and out of sight at a faster rate.

He built a new room into the side of the hut that was made completely from stone. He then carved into the roof of the house and formed a long chamber that led outside. In this cave-like room, he was able to store some pieces of firewood and light it to provide a lot more heat in the small space.

After a while, the man realized he would have to leave the child alone often to gather materials and supplies to sustain both of them. To avoid this, he built a system of aqueducts that could ferry in materials and water from the river. A giant glass cage was built around a patch of dirt for a garden, and rudimentary pipes were connected to the aqueducts underground that led to both the garden and the hut to provide a clean source of water.

In the garden, the child tended to stay there to play around with the dirt. But, the man discovered that the shadow sat alone and didn't have anyone else to play with it. So the man gathered his giant pile of trinkets and proceeded to create nearly living creatures that would never leave the child's side. They would stay near the child and play with it every day. At any sign of danger, they would immediately move to protect the shadow.

The more the man tinkered and built creations, the more the child was curious about what the man was doing. It began abandoning the garden to instead watch the man work on various projects from where it believed the man wouldn't notice it. The man beckoned the child forward one day to help him with his newest invention. As the child became more interested in building, the man decided to add tinkering to his teachings. He would teach the proper way to build and create beautiful inventions. With this knowledge, the child began making its own inventions in appreciation for the man that had taken in the shadow.

The older it grew, the more skill the shadow showed when creating its own inventions. However, it would also flicker in and out of sight as the years went by, which stopped it from being able to touch the tools for building. It grew worse the more it matured and became more like a man.

How was the man supposed to help the fading shadow? When the child didn't notice, the man would quietly weep over what was inevitable to happen. Every time the child appeared to flicker, the man would begin to fall back into his old habits of throwing away inventions. The pile that had been missing ever since the shadow was present in the hut began to slowly appear again.

The child grew worried over the growing pile, and would constantly gesture towards it in confusion. All the man could do was avoid the child's gaze and continue inventing in helplessness. This cycle continued for years, until the child was near adulthood.

One day, the shadow was attempting to start building a new project. It had only just picked up a gear from the pile when it suddenly collapsed and stopped moving. The man looked over at the fallen shadow, and was horrified that the shadow had completely disappeared for a few seconds before reappearing.

Panicked, the man did the only thing he knew how: he built and improved. He took the fertile soil from the garden and built a body. The man shaped a face for the shadow, in the likeness of the man himself. He used the machines that played with the child as references on how to shape and sculpt joints and the movement of the body. Water was poured into the inside of the soil in order to give it mass. Then, the flickering shadow was placed on top of the body-like structure. Right when the shadow sank through the solid form, the man immediately lit some firewood and set the form on fire.

At first, all the man saw was the flaming mass in front of him. He sank to his knees and looked down in despair at the life that would never come back. Then, a massive spark appeared before the fire. The man looked up and saw that this sudden burst of light jolted the body. The body then began to twitch in the blaze.

At the first sign of movement, the man immediately moved to put the fire out. In the smoke and ashes rose a young man that was the spitting image of the older man. He sported the bright blue eyes as the man that stared at the young adult, but still kept his striking black hair from the past. The young man slowly got up from the dirt and wiped some of the dust off of himself. The man immediately rose to hug the young man that was able to be saved.

The man pulled back and looked at the young man. Both were smiling widely and with great relief.

Then, the man spoke.

"In all these years, I haven't been able to create something worthwhile. You're the first creation that I'm truly proud of."

The other adult just smiled wider and patted the man's shoulder.

The man shook his head, "This new life you've been given deserves a name."

"I shall call you Adam."