**Chapter Ten: Self Reflection**

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The moment the show came to an end, the darkness that had taken over me retreated to the back of my mind, taking with it the unexplainable and irrational hate that had taken root in my heart. One moment I was basking in the aftermath of the chaos I had caused, delighting in the defeat of my foes; the next moment, my sanity had returned, and the tingling feeling of excitement running through my entire being was replaced by the dawning horror of what I had done.

What was wrong with me? Why had I flipped out like that? My earlier conduct was poles apart from how I normally acted. I am usually a soft spoken guy with a mellow attitude and very little aggression. Nothing in my history would explain why I suddenly turned into a maniac hell-bent on denouncing the government, the media, and two of the most widely used economic systems in the world. And what in God’s name was that mysterious darkness that had taken control of me? Was I going insane? Was it some form of Dissociative Identity Disorder?

I continued to flounder under the ceaseless bombardment of questions that I just couldn’t find suitable or at least plausible answers to. The situation was just too bizarre and unexpected. I was blindsided by the entire incident and didn’t know what I should do next, so I just stood there, paralyzed by confusion and indecision. I ended up frozen in the exact same triumphant pose that I had when the show had ended, completely motionless like a statue.

Unlike me, the other people in the filming studio didn’t have any similar problems of indecision; almost simultaneously, the majority of them started moving towards me. Some of them were walking, some were almost running, but all of them had one thing in common; they all had grim expressions on their faces.

The earlier fearlessness that had been inspired by the intense emotions that were evoked by the darkness had completely vanished along with the darkness’s influence, so when I witnessed the people in the room coalescing into what could only be described as an angry mob, it scared the living daylight out of me. Luckily, the fear that ensued from such a terrifying sight finally jolted me free from the debilitating paralysis of indecision that had frozen me in place, and I quickly made the only sane decision I could make in this situation; I decided to retreat.

Thankfully, the door to the green room that they had kept us inside while we were waiting for the show to begin was relatively close by, so I was able to escape into the door before anybody could get to me. I ran through the green room without stopping and dashed into the toilet that was found just beyond the door on the other side. I scampered into the clean white room before locking the door from the inside so that nobody could get in.

I had barely closed and locked the door when I heard loud banging coming from the other side of it. The incessant knocking was accompanied by a chorus of voices speaking all at once which blended together into one deafening cacophony of noise.

“Dr. Thorn, please open the door. We have many things that we need to discuss.”

“Mr. Thorn, you are not doing yourself any favors by locking yourself in there.”

“Dr. Thorn, I am from the company’s litigation office. I need to talk to you regarding possible infringement of the company’s rights. This is a serious matter that could result in major lawsuits that could end with you having to pay hefty fines or even serving jail time.”

“Open the damn door!”

“This is ridiculous Dr. Thorn. You can’t hide in there forever. Come out and face us like a man. Even though you look like a pansy, it doesn’t mean that you have to act like one.”

There were an assortment of voices trying to be heard: some were politely trying to coax me to open the door, some were loudly barking at me in pure rage and some were trying to intimidate me in one way or another, but the most vocal of them all was a familiar bellow that nearly shook the door off its frame, a bellow that I had heard only minutes before.

“You lily livered son of a bitch! You think that you can just humiliate me like that and run away? Your life is over! You hear me? Over! Did you honestly believe that there would be no consequences when you completely destroyed my reputation? Let me tell you something, I have friends in high places. I will make sure that you are destitute, penniless and living out of a box in the streets by the end of the week!”

Listening to the unhinged ravings of the enraged General was actually something of a relief for me. I felt perfectly justified when I thought about what I had done to him. I could explain exactly why I revealed precisely how disgusting the scummy asshole was. What I couldn’t do is to explain the rest of my rather spectacular outburst to the other members of the angry mob that had gathered outside before they decided to burn me at the stake. How was I going to get myself out of this jam? What was I going to tell the horde of angry people outside who were starting to sound worryingly similar to a pack of wild animals? Ah, sorry about throwing mud at your collective faces and maybe even irreparably damaging the reputing of your whole network, but I was being possessed by something when I did that. It was nothing personal. Can’t we just settle this with a few bottles of beer and forget it ever happened? For some reason, I doubt that a simple apology would appease them.

Compared to the impending sense of doom I felt when I thought about the mob outside, possibly sharpening their pitchforks and lighting their torches in preparation for my burning, I felt absolutely no fear or guilt when it came to the phony General. The bastard deserved every single insult that I threw at him, and he was naïve if he thought that he could intimidate me now that the show was over. Didn’t he understand what kind of deep shit he was in? Did he not understand that he no longer had enough clout to threaten a fly, let alone me? If he truly was that stupid, I would be happy to educate him.

“General Thurman, I want to make one thing very clear. I did not run away from you. I didn’t fear you before the show and I certainly do not fear you now. I don’t know if it is because you have started believing your own lies, but you seemed to have forgotten that you are not really a ferocious tiger. You holler about consequences, but what you have failed to realize is that your threats have become as hollow as your fake reputation. As for your so called ‘friends in high places’, I am completely certain that a man as vile as you has no friends. You have sycophants that you coerced or intimidated into following you and people who keep you around because they think you are useful to them. Now that the counterfeit reputation that you have so meticulously cultivated has come crashing down around your ears, the people that had meekly followed you because of your power will either abandon you or maybe even turn on you. You have terrorized a lot of people with your tyrannical ways, and I am sure there are a whole host of people that would only be too happy to take advantage of this situation to kick you while you are down. As for the second group of people that you think are your friends, they will have realized that associating with you is no longer beneficial to them. I wager that there wouldn’t be a single one of them that will answer a telephone call from you. General, you might not have realized it yet, but you are no longer a bright shining star in government. You have become a liability, nothing more than a pile of steaming hot dog shit that nobody wants to get close to. What I am trying to say is: do you want to destroy my life? Bring it on, but don’t expect me to wait with bated breath.”

As I spoke, I realized that the darkness might have been gone, but it still had some influence on me. In fact, there were still some lingering traces of aggression left behind from when it had possessed me. The scariest part was that it was blending almost seamlessly with my own anger so that I could barely differentiate between what I normally would have felt and what was being caused by the foreign influence of the darkness. I felt terrified that my very personality, the core of who I was and who I defined myself as a person, was being eroded by the malignant darkness that was roosting in my mind. I was terrified of losing myself to it, of eventually becoming less and less like me and more like it, but another part of me, a part that I wasn’t particularly proud of, was not sure if that was a bad thing. Since I was a little boy, there were certain labels that had plagued me wherever I went: weak, cowardly, gutless, girly. I couldn’t escape these labels when I was at home, at school, at work or even when I went to a restaurant to get some food. I couldn’t even run away from them in my own head because deep down inside, I thought that if everyone believed I was a craven sissy, maybe they were right. As a result, I was always self-conscious when it came to this matter, but all of that self-doubt and discomfort that I had because of this issue seemed to melt away when I was being possessed by the darkness. Instead of self-doubt, I felt confident in my own skin. As for what everybody else thought, I honestly didn’t give a shit. It was an extremely liberating experience for someone like me, a person who was sensitive to what people said about him. That was why a part of me, the part that always cringed whenever it felt other people’s gazes, wished for the darkness to come back to deal with the angry mob outside. Unfortunately, the darkness obstinately stayed in the far corner of my mind and refused to help me. In the end, all I could do was to scramble for a way out of the mess I found myself in, but the only idea I could come up with was a ridiculous ploy to stall them.

“Umm… can I please have a moment of privacy? I am trying to use the lavatory and I would appreciate it if I didn’t have a crowd breathing down my neck while I use the toilet.”

One of the more angry voices outside shouted, “What are you doing in there?”

“Do I need to draw you a fucking picture? What do you think I am doing? Just give me fifteen minutes, and I will come out when I am done.”

To be perfectly honest, I didn't really expect that the old "I am using the porcelain throne" excuse would hold enough water to get them off my back, but surprisingly enough, the crowd seemed to accept my bullshit explanation, which could at best be described as somewhat implausible, and they dispersed very quickly. I could tell that there were still people standing outside the door, but there were only one or two of them instead of the veritable throng of noisy bastards that were there only moments ago. Their departure was so sudden that I was starting to wonder if the thought of me defecating was really that terrifying when I heard a calm voice say, "Take your time in there Dr. Thorn. There is no need for you to hurry, so you can calmly take care of whatever business you have in there and no one will disturb you. We will discuss everything that has transpired and how to properly handle the inevitable fallout when you are ready."

Ahh... So it wasn't my rather flimsy excuse that drove off the mob? Who did that calm voice belong to? What kind of person had enough power to instantly force an unruly mob of people to disband and why was he helping me?

Just like the earlier bunch of questions that were plaguing me incessantly, this bunch of questions also didn't have convenient answers I could attach to them. I could of course just open the door to find out the mysterious polite man's identity, but something told me that I might not enjoy the experience. Even though the man had been very polite and sounded very reassuring, the amount of apprehension that was weighing down my stomach like a lump of lead had only increased from when I was being besieged by the angry mob. My alarm had gotten to the point that I could feel my own heart beating heavily against my chest and my breathing had gotten fast and shallow. I could feel myself getting more and more panicked, but I just couldn't understand why I was having such a dramatic reaction to a few nonthreatening words from this man. As time passed, my strange reaction only got worse until it got to the point where I was starting to show early symptoms of a panic attack. In the end, I decided that I was being silly. I was a certified psychologist for God's sake! How can I let myself crumble under a completely irrational fear? Sure, I didn't know the man, and it might be true that he might want to harm me in some way, but the possibility that he might harm me wasn't a reason for me to have a meltdown just because I heard his voice. I gritted my teeth, balled my hands into fists and shook off the weird reaction that my body was having. After regaining some of my composure, I walked away from the door and calmly walked to the sink so that I could splash some water on my face. Maybe the cold water could help me clear my head and sharpen my judgment.

I turned on the little tap, cupped the cold water that gushed forth in both my hands and vigorously washed my face with it. I could almost feel the cold water work its magic as some of the confusion and alarm started to fade away. When I was done, I looked up from the sink and came face to face with my own reflection in the mirror above the sink.

I couldn't help but grimace a little when I saw my visage being reflected by the mirror. My flinch wasn’t because I found my reflection to be unappealing. I didn’t have any scars or deformities. Actually, my face wasn't ugly by any means. If anything, my features could be considered pretty handsome, emphasis on the pretty. The curly golden brown hair, the large baby blue eyes, the thick eyelashes and small red lips made me look entirely too feminine. To make matters worse, even my facial structure was feminine; my cheekbones were dainty and my almost nonexistent jawline looked like it was carved with the gentleness of soft fluttering of butterfly wings, it was entirely too delicate.

All in all, I had the kind of face that confuses men and induces jealousy in women. Hell, if I saw a woman who looked like me walking down the street, I wouldn't even hesitate to ask her out. The problem is that I am not a woman, I am just a man that has a lot of features that most people associate with the standards for female beauty. That means that many men who see me experience some form of attraction or arousal, but then they are immediately disgusted and angry by their subconscious reaction. Unfortunately for me, most men don't want to confront themselves or be honest about what had happened so they automatically place all the blame on me. That means that I end up being detested for something I didn't do. I tried everything to make myself look more butch, but nothing seemed to work. I even tried working out so that I became muscular, but nothing could change my face and the animosity from almost all the men I met continued unabated.

As for the women part of the equation, I haven't had much luck with them either. There is the jealousy that I mentioned earlier, but that goes away pretty quickly. Instead, it is usually replaced by the intense desire to possess me, and when I say 'posses' I don't mean it in the way that two people who are attracted to each other would like to 'possess' one another. No, I mean it in the way that a person possesses a nice car, or a good house or a pretty purse. They want to own me so that they could parade me around to their friends and show off exactly how pretty I was. Were all women like that? No, but all of the women that have ever approached me only did so because they wanted to feed their own egos by having the shiniest boy toy of their group. As a psychologist, I found it interesting that women could exhibit the exact same traits that they find so abhorrent in men. As a person, I found these women to be very detestable. Did this mean I became a celibate monk? Hell no! Through the years, I have had more than my fair share of lovers, but the amount of serious relationships I have ever had could be counted on one hand. I got through my early years by telling myself that I was happy and that any man would kill to be in my position. A long list of casual lovers with no commitment? Who wouldn't want that? But as I grew older, I realized exactly how lonely such a life could be, for however much I was able to satisfy my more base needs, I couldn't fill the hole in my heart left by knowing that I didn't have a partner to share my life with.

Apart from my troubles with the two genders, my less than masculine features have also had a detrimental effect on all the other aspects of my life and my interaction with society. Through years of television and magazines, people have been programmed to recognize certain features as dependable and professional. The fact that I had none of these features combined with my face's apparent inability to age has had a less than desirable impact on my professional life. In fact, 'less than desirable' is a gross understatement. My professional life has been fraught with difficulties that originated solely from how I look. From my colleagues refusing to recognize my work simply because of my face to people ignoring me because they wouldn't believe I truly was an expert in my field, I had to put up with a lot of shit in my career. Hell, I had to take another professor whenever I had to teach a class I have never taught before simply to convince the students that even though I might look the same age as them, I am a 36 year old man and their teacher, not one of their classmates.

Besides inviting hate from men, making me unable to find a wife, and forever dooming me to a life where I am labeled a weak 'pretty boy' unworthy of respect, my looks have also had other serious impacts on my life, this time revolving around the relationship I had with my family and my life at home. My golden locks, blue eyes and delicate features were a constant reminder that I didn't belong in my family. I am the oldest in a family of four. That breaks down to two younger sisters, Olivia and Rose, and one younger brother, Thomas. All of them have straight black hair, strong jawlines and a certain heroic air about them that just screamed dominance. They are the kind of people that naturally exude an aura of aristocracy that intimidates other people. In short, they all looked and behaved similar to my mother, the no nonsense matriarch of my family. Next to my mom and my other siblings, my baby blues and angelic good-looks stuck out like a sore thumb.

It was no secret that I had a different father from the rest of my siblings. In fact, all but the last two of us have different fathers. What made my situation exceptional was that no one was willing to talk about my father. My mother, Dorothy Blackthorn, was a powerful business woman in a world that is mostly dominated by men, but that had made her somewhat jaded when it came to human relationships so it was not really surprising that her first marriage ended in divorce. Her marriage with wealthy oil tycoon Henry Letterman ended spectacularly with him leaving behind his daughter Olivia and taking virtually nothing when he left. Truth be told, most people were more surprised when her second marriage didn't implode in the same way. They find it shocking that it has lasted this long and continues to endure to this day. This marriage, which was to a little known French accountant named Jean Dupoint, has bore a daughter and a son, my younger brother and sister, Rose and Thomas.

As for me, the oldest brother, my past was much more murky than theirs. I was just a little six year old boy when I first got wind of the fact that I was a bastard born out of wedlock. On that fateful day, I had escaped from my nanny and was playing around near the kitchen when I overheard one of the maids talk about it to one of the other maids. I didn't understand exactly what the words 'bastard' or 'wedlock' meant but I could understand from their tones that it wasn't a good thing. Like any kid would do in this situation, I ran to my mother to ask her what the two words meant.

My mother might have been cold and unfeeling when she dealt with other people, but she had always been very caring and warm whenever she was with me. In fact, that day was the very first time that I had ever seen the scary side of my mother that she had always carefully hidden from me. It was as if the caring and warm personality was just an illusory mask, and in that instant, it dissolved right before my eyes.

Appearance wise, she didn’t really change. She didn’t frown in anger, she didn’t flush in rage, and she didn’t even gnash her teeth. She looked exactly the same as she always did when she played silly little children games with me or when she read me a bedtime story so that I could sleep.

No, the way she transformed wasn’t very obvious to the eye, yet at the same time, the way that the atmosphere around her had shifted was so dramatic that it was discernable even to my six year old self. She calmly smiled at me but everything about that smile was wrong. What was supposed to be a friendly gesture turned into something frighteningly predatory. She asked me where I had heard such words and I answered honestly that I had heard it from the maids. At that moment, I was so scared that I didn’t even consider lying to her. When she heard my answer, she smiled again and nonchalantly left the room. When she returned, the scary monster that had possessed my mother had disappeared. She was still smiling, but it was the warm familiar smile that I was used to seeing on her face, instead of the draconian abomination that I had witnessed earlier. She even sat me down on her lap and explained to me how the two words I had heard were very bad words that were used by stupid and mean people. She told me that I didn’t have the same daddy as my little sister and that my father was not a very good man. She told me that that some people would try to use these facts to insult me but that I should also remember that none of these insults were true. She finished by telling me that I didn’t need a father because I had a mother that loved me more than anything else in the world and that talking about my father made mommy very sad. She made me promise to never talk about him again, and that was the last time I heard anything about my father.

That might seem a little harsh, but to be frank, I didn’t care about the identity of my father since I had everything I could ever want as a child. Was I curious? Sure, I was curious, but I was also quite content to be pampered by my mother. I never wanted to see that scary part of her again.

Long story short, I grew up to be a spoiled little brat that got whatever he wanted. I had absolutely no responsibilities except to do the bare minimum to achieve passing marks in my studies. The part that really special was that my mother didn’t show that kind of affection to any of my other siblings. She was incredibly strict with them and made them work unbelievably hard at everything while coddling me and making sure that I was happy. I’m ashamed to say that the fact that my mother treated me better than my brother and sisters made me feel a sense of superiority.

But as the years went by and I grew older and wiser, I realized that my mother’s tough attitude towards my siblings wasn’t a sign of disregard but a sign of esteem. She was grooming them to take over the vast financial empire that she had built over the years.

Where did that leave me? Even though I was the oldest son, it was clear that she had very little expectations from me. I realized that she just wanted me to live a life of luxury without having any effect on the company she had built.

The realization that my mother, the person that I loved the most, thought so little of me nearly crushed me to pieces. I was so depressed that I spent almost half a year just drinking and partying as hard as I could, but no matter how much I drank and no matter how many parties I went to, I couldn’t forget that I was nothing but a piece of worthless garbage with no potential. In my mother’s eyes, I was of no value to her. These thoughts tormented me until I finally decided that it wasn’t okay to just live my life flitting from party to party and smelling like whisky. I decided to prove that I was useful, that I was no less than my siblings.

That year, I quit drinking and cleaned up my act. I stopped going to parties and started focusing on my studies for the first time in my life. My hard work eventually paid off and I graduated with full honors from Washington University. I even managed to graduate with two different majors at the same time, psychology and economics. I chose those two fields because I believed that they were the two fields that would allow me to be most useful to my mother.

The day after I graduated, I immediately returned to my home where I expected to be welcomed with open arms, but my expectations were dashed by what awaited me. My mother was apathetic when I told her about my accomplishments.

At first I was confused by her reaction. Didn’t she understand? I had worked so hard that I had ignored every other aspect of my life excluding food and sleep. I had dedicated myself to proving myself to her. I had worked so hard that it even impressed the university enough to grant me an academic scholarship. They nearly begged me to enter their masters program, all on their own dime. Why was she ignoring what I was saying? Why was she talking about a new estate she had bought me in the Hamptons? Why was she telling me that it was the best time to take a vacation in the Swiss Alps?

Eventually, I realized that what I achieved meant absolutely nothing to her. She didn’t see me as someone worthy of helping her. She just wasn’t able to see me as something more than a helpless spoiled little boy and it didn’t matter how much I try. In her mind, I was forever going to remain as the useless one in the family. They didn’t need me to help them. They didn’t want me to help them.

It took me a few minutes, but my mother’s complete indifference to my announcement and what it meant finally sunk in. At first I just couldn’t believe it. I tried to explain why I did what I did but she continued to talk about other nonsense, not showing even a smidgeon of interest. Finally, I just snapped and started shouting at her. On the day that I was supposed to have my triumphant return to my home, I had a huge row with my mother and I left with all my expectations dashed into pieces.

With my ultimate life goals turning into a meaningless joke, I didn’t have any purpose left in my life anymore, so I just continued to do what I was doing: studying economics and psychology at the university. Habit is a truly frightful thing. Even with my loss of motivation, I just continued with my daily life because I had nothing better to do. I continued in that vein until I received my PhDs in both these subjects and that meant that I had reached the end of that particular road.

At first, I considered learning other things but I was sick and tired of just aimlessly devouring information from textbooks, so I left the university and just wandered aimlessly through the country, looking for something to occupy myself. During my travels, I inevitably found myself devoid of ready money so now and then, I went to the bank to refill my wallet and it was during these visits that I noticed something odd was going on. My visits would always start normally with an almost robotic teller treating me apathetically but it would always end with the same teller suddenly becoming enthusiastic and helpful. Sometimes the branch manager of the bank would even make a personal appearance to make sure that I was being treated well. At first I assumed that they had somehow figured out that I was one of the scions of the Blackthorn family and were trying to get into my good graces, but my suspicions were raised when my treatment didn’t change even after I legally changed my last name from Blackthorn to just Thorn.

It was during one of these bank visits that I found out that the reason for the special treatment I was receiving wasn’t because of who I was but because of how much money I had in my account. For an Economist, I am ridiculously careless with money so I never really checked how much money I had in my account. I was perfectly content to just let the bank handle everything since I thought that all I had in my account was my meager earnings from teaching part time at the university. I had no idea that my mother had snuck in a quarter of a billion dollars when I wasn’t looking. When I found out about this little fact, what little pride had left took a further hit. Most people might have seen the money as something good but I just saw it as just another sign of my mother’s contempt. It was like two hundred and fifty million little posters from my mother that indicted how incompetent I am and how little she had faith in me. The unsolicited charity money made me fly into a rage and I immediately tried to return it, but the confused bank teller kept telling me that it was impossible. Eventually, the ruckus that I was causing attracted the bank manager’s attention. He made a few phone calls and confirmed the bank teller’s assertions that the money couldn’t be returned, but he did find out that the large deposit that was made into my account came with a message. The printed out message that he handed me read: “My sweet little angel, I know that this is probably unwelcome after how our last conversation ended. I think that there has been a grave misunderstanding about my motives when I acted to stop you from entering the family business. The truth is that I never wanted to keep you away from the business; I wanted to keep the business away from you. Since you were just a child, it was clear to me that you had a pure soul filled with generosity and love. Even as you grew into a willful teenager that was drunk half the time, you still managed to have enough kindness in your heart to secretly give away half of your allowance to charity. At your core, you are a compassionate person, and the last thing I wanted to do was snuff out that pure light in your soul by exposing you to the ugly and treacherous world that big companies like ours operate in. Your brother and sisters were born with a certain ruthlessness and cunning that you lack, so they manage to thrive in this world, but I would rather you stay my unblemished little angel than become a successful businessman.

P.S. I hope that you take this money in the spirit that it is meant, as a small gift from you mother to make sure that your life is comfortable.”

The message from my mother didn’t fix everything, but it did help me calm down. I still felt that my mother was just trying to mollify me with a thinly veiled excuse but I was sick and tired of thinking that I was inept or insufficient in some way. I took the money as compensation for the distress I was put through for half my life and went back to the University to teach full time.

The winding road that was memory lane finally ended and I found myself back in the present, still staring at my reflection. It was a little absurd that just looking at my reflection brought up all of these memories and complex emotions. I chuckled a bit at myself and said, “You are one funny guy John. For a psychologist, you sure do have a lot of psychological issues.”

My laughter rang out in the empty toilet sounding a little unhinged. Maybe I really was going crazy. There was the entire ‘getting possessed and going off on live TV’ debacle from before and now I was talking to my own reflection.

<Could be worse. Your reflection could start talking back. That is when you know that you have really lost it.>

The sarcastic answer to my unspoken thoughts coming from what I thought was an empty room startled me so much that I slipped on the wet ceramic floor and fell back on my ass. While I was still sprawled on the ground, I looked around in search of the source of the voice, but I could find neither hide nor hair of anybody in the toilet. I turned my head in every direction, trying to find the person that had spoken, but my efforts turned out to be in vain.

<Hey princess, over here. Not there, over here. Look forward and up.>

I unconsciously followed the instructions of the teasing voice, and my eyes fell on the mirror. The angle was oblique, and the sink was blocking most of it because I was on the ground but I could see something moving in the mirror. I looked behind me to check what was being reflected, but there was nothing to see. I turned back to the mirror and I could still see something moving.

<There we go. Hello Johnny boy, nice to meet you. Umm, can you get up from the floor? This angle isn’t very suitable for a conversation, plus you never know what is on the floor of a toilet.>

To my horror, it dawned on me that the voice was coming from the mirror. I was so shocked by that realization that I scuttled backwards in fear to try and get away from the mirror as fast as possible. I didn't even try to get up from the floor, I just scuttled backwards like a startled insect until my back was pressed up against the closed door of the bathroom stall behind me, and since I was no longer right underneath the mirror, I could clearly see what was being reflected on it.

It was my own reflection, but it was not mimicking my movements like a normal reflection should. No, it was looking down at me with a mocking smile as if it was amused by my distress.

So this is what insanity felt like? First was that whole darkness possession thing, then there was the irrational fear caused by the calm stranger’s voice and now I was having hallucinations. That last one was the final nail in the coffin; I could no longer deny that I had lost my sanity.

<You are not insane. I am not just a hallucination that was created as a result of psychosis. Granted, you are not exactly well balanced and your mind is more messed up than you realize, but you are not crazy.>

My own reflection was telling me that I wasn't crazy. I guess it made sense that when a person like me who has a lot of issues with his or her image cracks under pressure, his or her subconscious would create a construct based on that person's image. Plus there was the fact that the construct I had created was answering questions my unasked questions which conclusively proved that the autonomous reflection in the mirror was not real. It was just in my head.

<Not every woman you meet is conniving bitch, not every guy you meet is a homophobic hate projecting bastard, and not every person you meet looks down on you. I have seen some of your memories and some of the problems that you have interacting with other people stems from your own preconceptions about how people perceive you, but everybody has this problem to one extent or another, it is just a bit extreme in your case. This doesn't mean you are nuts. As for the second part of your conjuncture, yes I am in your head, but that does not mean I am not real. What was that famous quote? ”There are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamt by your philosophy.” I am not simply a part of you. My memories are woefully incomplete, but what I do know is that I wasn’t always like this. I have memories of being a complete person instead of this shadow that you see now.>

For a fraction of a second, his expression became sad and confused but it instantly reverted back to that teasing smile, making me doubt if I had really seen the lost look in his eyes in the first place.

<What I am trying to say is that I am a fragment of something, but not your imagination or subconscious. I did not originate from you, but I wasn’t complete enough to function on my own so I did take pieces of you to complete myself. In conclusion, I am not you, but I am not not-you either.>

Once again, it seems like my day just gets stranger and more complex with every hour that passes. At this juncture I could only proceed by making a choice on whether my reflection was telling the truth or not. I could either believe his story and proceed with the assumption that something unbelievable had happened yet I still retained my sanity, or I could do the rational thing and admit that I needed professional medical help.

While the second choice might appear to be the more obvious choice but it was also the less appealing one. Crazy or not, I did not want to admit myself into a psychiatric hospital. With that in mind, I made the decision to go along with my reflection’s words, at least for now.

“Alright, let us say that I believe you. If you are something that is partly made out of my own psyche, what is the rest of you made of? Who are you? What are you? ”

<Johnny boy, you are going to hurt my feelings! We only met a couple of minutes ago and you have already forgotten about me?>

That was when everything clicked. Something foreign that got into my mind recently; there was only one thing that could fit that description. It was actually quite obvious, but the way things were going, it wasn’t that surprising that it took me this long to figure it out. The apparition that was masquerading as my own reflection was the same mysterious darkness that had possessed me earlier.

<Bingo. Give the man a prize.>

I remembered all the hate and resentment in that I felt radiating from the darkness, and I felt fear. What kind of malicious spirit had infected me? Was it some kind of demon?

As I spoke, the familiar image of myself being reflected in the mirror started to change. The pale skin turned ink black. A pair red eyes appeared above the two normal blue ones and antler like horns started to grow out of the forehead of my reflection.

<No. That doesn’t feel right. I am angry and bitter, but I am not evil.>

The terrifying image of the demon reverted back to my own likeness. What the hell was that? Was I really possessed by a demon?

<Relax cupcake. I did tell you that I was just a fragment of something and that I was using pieces of you to complete myself. I am nothing more than a dissociated consciousness and the question of my identity remains ambiguous. That is why I currently look like this, much of my identity is taken from you so I look like you. When you brought up the idea that I might be a demon, that idea affected how I saw myself and as such, the image that I have of myself also changed accordingly. Once I discarded that idea, I returned to being your twin brother.>

“Doesn’t that mean that one day you could decide that you are a psychotic murderer and I would be stuck with a psychotic murderer in my head?”

<That is a fair point, but I guess that is just a risk you have to live with. You are stuck with me so I suggest that you don’t think too hard about such depressing possibilities, your life is dismal enough as it is. Just pretend I am not here until we figure things out. If you need to contact me, just think and I will know. Nobody else can hear me so try not to react overtly when I say things to you or people will start thinking you are crazy. Now, unless you are planning on living here forever, I think it is about time that you get out of this damn toilet.>