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THE WHITE ROOM

Jacob Zimmerman

Mr. Webster liked his room. It was white, stark, with two plastic chairs, a plastic table, a metal bed, a toilet, and a shower in the corner. There was one window, but he never looked out. He could not remember why. It was small, with bars over it. There were three florescent lights in the ceiling, each parallel to the others. There was a clock on the wall with a white face, black numbers, and black hands. At nine every night, the lights went off, and at eight the next day, the lights came on. Sometimes before the lights came on, sunlight would fall through the window. In the wall was one white door with a brass handle that failed to work for Mr. Webster. Sometimes it would open, and someone would come. He wished it would happen more often—he could not remember the last time he had a visitor.

Mr. Webster was sitting at his table, on one of his chairs, looking up at the window. It was two fifty eight in the afternoon.

The door opened.

A man, an old-looking thirty-five in a business suit and a bowler hat, entered. The man had brilliant blue eyes, a big nose, and square glasses that seemed too small for his face. Mr. Webster looked at him. There was nothing in the man's hands, but he held them like he was carrying a tiny package.

“Hello.” Mr. Webster said, smiling. “What day is it?”

“Thursday.” The man said.

“What month?”

“October.”

“What year?” The man did not answer. Instead, he moved leisurely to the seat opposite Mr. Webster, the feet of the chair scraping against the floor as the man slid it back and sat down.

“I don't see how that's important.” The man said quietly, offering a quaint smile.

“Very well.” Mr. Webster leaned in. “You remind me of someone. Your face looks very familiar. Those eyes. I feel like I should know whose eyes those are.”

“They were your wife’s.” The man said, blinking.

“My wife. Hmm. Knew there was someone I was forgetting. How did you get those eyes?”

“You gave them to me.”

“I have no memory of doing that. How do they work?”

“Not that well. You see that I have to wear glasses.”

“Do you know what happened to my wife?”

“Yes.” The man said, softly. Silence.

“So, why are you here?” Mr. Webster leaned back, away from the man.

“I thought it would be nice to drop in. See you again.” The man smiled once more.

“And when was the last time you saw me? I have no memory of you.”

“Last week. Thursday.”

“Wonderful.” Mr. Webster leaned in. “That nose looks familiar. It seems very large. Is it useful?”

“Have you ever looked in the mirror?” The man asked. “That’s why it looks familiar.” Mr. Webster carefully reached up to his face, brushing his fingers across his own nose before bringing them back down to his lap.

“Do I have an extra nose I don’t know about?” Mr. Webster asked.

“In a sense, yes.” the man took a deep breath, glancing around. “How do you like your room?”

"Its very white. A little too much light for me. But the sun comes in my window on most mornings. That's nice. Where am I again?"

"In your room." The man in the hat stopped smiling.

"I don't remember coming here. That is very strange. I would think that would be something I would remember. Where is my wife? I would think she would want to be here too. I don't see why she can't be."

"Don't worry." The man smiled again. "You sent her away a long time ago."

"Really? Why would I do that?"

"Well," the man sighed, "you did. There's no way to change that now." Mr. Webster paused.

"Why did I do that?" He said.

"I don't know." The man said.

"Oh." Mr. Webster said. "I don't remember doing that."

"You never do."

"How did it happen?" Mr. Webster asked, leaning forward.

"You always ask the same questions. You crushed a bottle of lorratab and put it in a turkey sandwich you made for her."

"Why?"

"I don't know. You'd have ask yourself that question, because I can't think of a reason. You thought it was sugar. You confused it with vitamins. You wanted...I'm sorry." The man said slowly, rising. Mr. Webster watched him. "This always happens. I have to go."

"Why?" Mr. Webster said, confused. "I upset you? What were we talking about?"

“Goodbye.” The man reached across the table, reaching his arm around Mr. Webster’s body. Mr. Webster did not know what to do. The man walked towards the door.

“Wait.” Mr. Webster stood. “Am I a bad person? I can’t remember. Please come back.” The man turned away as he rapped on the door three times. The door swung open. The man looked back, and then he was gone.

Mr. Webster walked over to his bed, lying down. He looked up at the ceiling. Everything was white. Mr. Webster liked his room. It was white, stark, with two wooden chairs, a wooden table, a metal bed, a toilet, and a shower in the corner. There was one window, but he never looked out. He could not remember why.