



Seeing is believing...

"Find the red crown. Is this the black dagger or the crimson king? Crimson king pays three to one, but we're all still having fun," sang the three card monte dealer. His game was weak. Even when he stepped up his speed and increased the shuffle, it was all still weak. I didn't even need the eyes. I could've beat him fair and square. I could've beaten him at his game without seeing it all. Why did I have to see it all? I can see the little bag of mix he carried. The combination of shiny sand and dark sand. The silvery concoction bordering between Heaven and Hell that the dark sider's snorted in the back alleys.

"Shall tomorrow fate me anew or will a shovel bury you too?" they whispered as they snorted fate. Tripping on fate everything could go their way or get out of their way as they destroyed all in their path. Luck of the dice. Luck of the three card monte man. The three card monte man just drew the deuce of daggers. They were staring at him, reading his intentions and his soul. I waited. I waited for him to cheat. I waited for him to pocket the crimson king. A sloppy move that only a fool would fall for. A fool like my client. It only took three bets. I won three in a row and he pocketed the crimson king. It was all so easy.

Lifelines...

I could see the threads and choices. There were so many strands just a few moments ago. They all vanished when I flipped over all the cards. There was no crimson king. The people around the water barrel began to protest, calling the dealer a cheat. I could see the choices he was left with. When I pulled down my sunglasses slightly to show him my eyes his choices narrowed further. I watched him run away. It was simply a matter of picking the right path to follow. If he ran in a straight-line he might've lost me. He just kept doubling back, making it easy. I knew where he was going. I wanted to control it. He almost threw me for loop when he tried to grab an air dragon. One was sitting at the edge of one of the building complexes. The auto door opened like a Delorean batwing. Underneath it was shelter from the driving rain outside. Inside the cab, protected behind safety glass, was his angel of mercy. The crooked dealer had a full 50 foot lead. He could've made it. He should have made it. It just wasn't in the cards for him. I drew the yod. One shot grazing the windshield and leaving a spider web was all it took. The panic driver rocketed skyward with his door still open. The dealer had only two choices left, a 1,000 foot drop or just give up.

Payback...

It didn't take much convincing for him to show me the waterlogged cardboard box he called a home. In an oil cloth was a jeweled key. It wasn't one of the crude brass keys with the serial number stamped on it. It glistened and sparkled even in darkness. There were a few bags of shiny sand. There was even a bag of dark sand. I had my fix in my pocket. I looked at the withered little man. He wasn't a monster like me. He was just a hollowed shell. You have to take it straight. You can't mix the good with the bad. If you want to be a demon. There is no mercy. That's the difference. He begged. He pleaded. He was lucky was I am not a demon, yet.

Different worlds...

The jeweled key lead me back to my client. Her simple country dress didn't fit in this Bladerunneresque world. I seriously expected Hector Alessandro to be making origami figures and threatening Don Johnson. This world even had the zeppelins and cops walking around in power armor they called sentinels. Why they had to have oak barrels everywhere didn't make a lick of sense. They just seem to be stacked in the corners like props from some old pirate movie.

I see...

I handed her back her missing key. She looked at me questioningly. "So, what is the price?" she asked. My eyes can see everything. They see 360° x 360° on all axis. They can see into my own skull and passed it. I can look up side down or backwards if I choose. They see intentions. They see things that are hidden. I can see with them as I sleep and when I dream. They told me what they wanted me to take from this woman. Hell, I couldn't even follow directions when Phyllo gave them to me. I hadn't lost my humanity. Not yet. The eyes wanted me to take her shoes. The result would be that she cuts her foot horribly. She would lose a leg before reaching home. I rejected that scenario. For that the eyes punished me.

The Devil's due...

She raised her dress. Something she had done far too often. Why is it that these country folk think the only commodity they have is their sex?, I thought. Then again, it was the one thing a woman always had that men always wanted. It stirred me even now. The more I gave into my temptations the less guilt I felt. When I entered her she was surprisingly wet. Her eyes were locked on my sunglasses. Reaching up she grabbed my shoulders. Wrapping her slender dirty legs around my waist. I've lost weight since my change but I'm still a heavy guy. She had to open her legs very wide to wrap them around my waist. She even manage to lock her ankles around my back and pull her self closer to me. Reaching up, she put her hands on my shoulders. I felt my whole body becoming harder. All of my muscles were flexed. This woman was giving me something. This was wrong. I am the devil. I'm supposed to be the one taking. What was she doing? What would be the consequence? *There was always a consequence*, I thought.

"Let me see your eyes," she asked huskily in between thrusts. I couldn't see her intentions. I was losing control. I pulled off my glasses and she saw the wet obsidian surface of my eyes. She didn't flinch or wince. Last time I looked I had spider web black capillaries in my eye lids. It reminded me of a satanic doll. She stared into my eyes as she fucked me harder. Her orgasm was sudden and violent. I couldn't hold up against it. I had never had a woman do me like that. She craved my power and wanted to give her sacrifice to me. She wanted to worship at the feet of the devil. The eyes knew exactly what they were doing. Because they knew I liked it. They knew I would want more.

Loss...

Penelope shivered awake in Alice's arms. Alice could feel the dirt mites crawling in her skin. They crawled in and out of the ugly words on her skin. She rocked little Penelope in her arms like a baby. Her eyes flew open and she stared at Alice's face. "I can't move. What's happening to me?" asked Penelope.

"A part of you is dying. It is a sacrifice I chose for you. Forgive me," asked Alice. Alice held her friend in the moonlight as the dirt mites did their work.

Shattered...

Alex, on his knees before the hourglass, heard a voice from outside. The conflicting thoughts in his mind settled on one decision. Alex picked up the hourglass and threw it at the wall. He cast away destiny and fear. He was his own free and clear. When it hit the wall, the wall itself shattered like glass. It left a dark sucking void. The edges of the hole in the world were sharp and jagged. Walking over, Alex ran his fingers over the surface of reality. He could feel the cinderblock wall all the way to the edge where it became sharp and clear like glass. Beyond the opening in the reality was something other than darkness, our reality, or even existence. His eyes wanted to skip over it. Alex stepped into the void. He thought he'd feel icy pain. Stabbing needles in his flesh. But there was nothing. He didn't even feel his fingers or his feet on the ground. He couldn't see and then he couldn't think. Alex was free of the world of maps forever.

Playtime...

Phyllo, was at home in a pile of Legos. Picking up the odd assortment of pieces and sticking them together to build spires and towers of odd pieces. Castles that resembled spaceships piloted by Spiderman and Harry Potter. Across the play area the animal breath of a bull with those unblinking yellow eyes stared through a black veil. The one hand still gesticulating as it spoke, "Something's happening to our little wanderers."

Phyllo looked at a small collection of Lego people sitting in the middle of the pile of random pieces. A cowboy with the head of Twoface from a Batman collection of Legos. He had been sitting off on his own away from the other pieces. He faded out of existence forever. "Well, he's out of play for both of us now," said Phyllo.

"I hate this game. It's a childish game," said the dark master. He had built very little. Mostly mountains of irregular rubble. They paled in comparison to the various delicate spires that Phyllo had made.

"That's because you only have one hand. The hand of destruction. You can't build with just one tool," said Phyllo. He spoke absently as he carefully connected a spider looking section of an Aquanauts playset to something resembling a neon dollhouse.

"It's time for something new. Let's see what I find," said the dark master. He reached over and picked up a mechanic wearing a Sith robe and proceeded to dance him like a parody of marching. That one perfect hand moved the toy behind a pile of rubble.

"What are you doing?" asked Phyllo. His voice had more exasperation than anything else.

"He's my finder. Not yours. You lost him, remember." From around the corner squeaked a plastic tank. Its servos roared like a heavy diesel engine. Sitting atop it was an ice cream man. Next to him was a mechanic in the Sith robe. Sitting on the back of the tank was a lady in a red dress. The tank moved slowly as the dark master operated the controls with one hand. He slowly turned the barrel and fired a rubber tipped plastic dart. It struck one of the towers and toppled over. The dark master began to load again.

"Wait, the girl on the back. She is a new piece. You can't bring in a new piece into the game," said Phyllo defiantly.

"Like hell, what do you call that?" he pointed to one of the pieces holding a pinwheel.

"She was touched by you long before. You brought her into the game, not me. Fair is fair. I'm allowed another piece," said Phyllo defiantly. He almost resembled a child.

"The doors are over there, feel free to choose," said the dark master.

Phyllo walked over to the doors. There were three. The first was a heavily stained green lacquer wood with the word, "coward," written on it. The middle one was cast iron with the word "wanderer" written on it. The last door was an ornate mahogany with a brass plate with the word "adventurer."

Phyllo started towards one of the doors. His body froze and he began to hear the voices. Phyllo turned towards the dark master. "They can't be talking to me. I'm a guide. Like them," asked Phyllo defiantly.

"Oh, they're far more than what you are, little one," said the dark master. "Their power is growing. It's their decision. You trust in your beloved humanity. Can you let your fate lie in the hands of the unknown? Can you let go of your ego for the greater good and the will of all? You asked that of your travelers. The question is can you make that decision yourself?"

Phyllo, looked at the door he needed. He shut his eyes and he waited. "Please, choose the right path."

While you were sleeping...

Alice gently rocked what remained of Penelope. The one friend she had in this world and she sacrificed so much of her to the dark wind. Could she ever be forgiven? Penelope looked up at Alice. "Is it over?" asked Penelope.

"Yes, it's over. How do you feel?" asked Alice.

"Funny... but I'm not in pain," said Penelope holding up her fingers and flexing them slightly. She wiggled her toes next. She had a puzzled expression. Sitting up, she walked over and looked in the mirror. Dropping the bed sheets she used to cover herself she clasped her hands to her face and stifled a scream. She had to pull her fingers away from her face slowly, it was hard to take it all in. Her skin was creamy smooth. It was also completely unblemished by the tattoo needle. She still had the cross scar just below her navel where someone had removed her guide. Alice wondered why the dirt mites didn't remove the scar. Maybe there are some things the dirt mites can't touch. She placed her hands on her stomach and thought about the microscopic insects swimming over her body. She thought of Phyllo and his wings.

"I'm sorry, I needed to give them something. The dark wind is so powerful here. It's almost deafening. I can still feel the buzzing in my head," said Alice absently placing her fingers over the childish stomach. The thing inside her was starting to show.

"You're apologizing. This is the greatest gift anyone's ever given me." She turned around several times in front of the mirror examining herself. She began to dance around, spinning herself absently before the cloth curtains. She created a silhouette against the morning light. Performing movement that was so beautiful and uninhibited. She was the antithesis of the Penelope Alice knew. Alice still wondered if she had the right to take so much of Penelope's burden away. *Could she strip that much of the person's identity*, she thought.

"I didn't know you can control the dark wind," said Penelope with wonder.

"I don't think I can. Or least I don't know if I did. I don't know," said Alice. What she really meant was she didn't want to know if she could. Because she knew that if she could control the dark wind she would want to use it. She would want to use it a lot. Alice tried not to think about the possibilities. Whether she wanted to or not, the ideas still danced in the back of her mind.

"This reminds me of a book the manager left in his office," said Penelope. "I wonder if the Rider killed him. He was scheduled to come work the shift after I did. Comes in then finds a place wide open. No show, no call, abandoned my post. He walks in, then unlocks the freezer and there's cowboy ugly ready to do his worst." Alice couldn't tell if the expression on her face was disgust or amusement. Alice settled on fear.

The cloud passed from Penelope's face and she continued, "The story was in one of those dirty books only old men and women whose husband's can't grow a cornstalk get." She sauntered over towards Alice still sitting on the bed. "The girl in that story had the ability to never be seen. But only if she was naked. She would sneak out at night just because it turned her on," said Penelope, climbing onto the bed walking on all fours towards Alice. "She fell in love with a dashing thief that would help her hide at night by covering her body in black paint. Just like latex. Well, you know... Anyway she fell in love with this thief." Her face was right in front of Alice's. Alice's lips involuntarily parted, wanting.

"Well, then what happened?" asked Alice.

"I don't know, I didn't finish it," answered Penelope with a wry smile.

"Bitch," Alice reached over and grabbed Penelope by the shoulder and rolled her onto her back. The two tumbled on the bed until Penelope almost fell off the side. Giggling and painting from the excitement Penelope brushed her hair behind her shoulder and asked, "Why didn't you finish the book?"

"Because I was done with it," said Penelope, her eyes flashing. Alice was so dumb struck by this Penelope had to giggle mockingly at her.

She still was the snarky bitch. As Penelope laughed at Alice's naïveté, she stopped seeing the intensity in her eyes. Penelope swallowed as Alice leaned forward. Her hair fell off her shoulder creating a veil that hid their shared moment from the world. One more stolen moment that wasn't foretold by maps. **** leave brake for knocking sound***** A stolen moment that was interrupted by a knock on the door.

Decisions decisions...

As Alice up got from the bed, she thought about just picking up the knife and stabbing whoever was at the door. Alice heard there was such a thing called housekeeping. Which struck Alice as silly,

considering they were borrowing the room and yet someone had to come in and keep it. Why didn't they just call it room cleaning? *Whoever this is will have to come in just a little bit later*, she thought. Standing on her tiptoes she looked through the eye hole. She saw the back of a man with silver hair. He turned and looked at her with a weathered yet handsome face. His broad mouth stretched into a smile that was so broad and white it looked predatory. His face filled the view so much that it looked like a balloon with his body dangling below like a string dressed in a black cassock. "We need to talk about your sacrifice. We need to talk now."

The map keeper knocked on the door once again. This time Alice could see the smooth stump of where his hand once was. She looked at the chain and door lock. She looked over at Penelope still lying naked on the bed. The voices of the road guides began to echo in her mind once more and she knew this time if they didn't choose right someone was going to die.

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