

Figment

Episode 5

After arriving back from his trip to the mall, Jonathan parked his car in the third slot in from the end of the lane. As he slid the faded-orange shifting square over the illuminated P on his dashboard, Jonathan noted that the tank of gas was indeed full. He just topped it off on his way back, just to be safe. He pulled a pen and pad of paper from the glove box and wrote down his mileage. The sudden drop in gas left Jonathan thinking that somebody might be driving his car. The only problem was that he and his parents were the only ones with keys and he doubted his parents would drive three hours just to take his car somewhere.

He got out of the car and locked the door before closing it, then walked around the entire car, making sure that all the doors were locked. He even tried pulling up on the trunk to be certain he had not bumped the release lever next to his seat. Satisfied that there was no way anybody could get into his car without the key, a rock, or an elaborate car theft system, Jonathan began to walk back to his dorm. He stopped only after a few feet and picked up a small stone. Having grown up with a younger brother who was always messing with his stuff, Jonathan learned to set small, unnoticeable traps that would confirm his suspicions that his brother was going into his bedroom or using his computer. Jonathan placed the small stone under the backside of the passenger side tire. He figured that if someone were to be getting in on the driver side they would notice the stone and replace it after returning the car, and if placed behind the rear tire it could be seen while approaching the car. Now truly satisfied, Jonathan walked back to his dorm, arriving just in time to meet up with Craig for some lunch.

Craig was walking out of the dorm building just as Jonathan was coming in. The look on Craig's face told Jonathan instantly that he should hold the bag from Hot Topic in front of him, or least be pounced upon by a 200 pound gay man. Craig snatched the bag out of Jonathan's hands and thrust his hand inside with a gleeful giggle of joy. The undistinguishable black and gray tone of the shirt suggested that it came from the gothic and punk trend store, but as soon as Craig held it up against his chest, showing Jonathan the image of a small yellow hamster and the quotation suggesting that Craig had an army of such furry little creatures at his disposal that he would unleash significantly unto an unsuspecting village, thus rendering it's total and unneeded annihilation confirmed such conclusion.

"You really do like that shirt," Jonathan said taking the bag back from Craig and wadding it up into a small ball to be thrown away as they passed the trash can. Jonathan tossed the bag, but missed and bent down to pick it up. Meanwhile, Craig was slipping the shirt over his head and tugging it down over his red t-shirt that he had already been wearing.

“You have no idea.” Craig said. “Hamsters of Doom are the coolest thing in the world.” He snagged the bag out of Jonathan’s hands again and shot it towards the trashcan like a basketball. It bounced off the rim and rolled into the basket.

“I thought you gay people were all fashion conscience.” Jonathan pointed out as they began walking towards The Village. Since the campus was located in the center of a fairly large, but still relatively small city, a single street that ran through the middle of the campus was littered with stores, restaurants, and bars. The students referred to this gathering of markets as The Village. Not many of the current students knew why exactly, and neither did Craig or Jonathan, but they did enjoy eating the world famous Carter’s Hot Dogs.

“Awesome shirts take precedence over fashion,” Craig scolded in a joking matter. “Plus red really isn’t my color and I haven’t done laundry yet.”

“You can wear the same shirt more than once without having to wash it.” Jonathan stated matter-of-factly. “I’ve worn this pair of underwear three days straight.”

“Eww, that’s gross.” Craig said sticking out his tongue. “Why would you do that?”

“They’re comfortable. They don’t ride up in the ass and don’t bunch up my ball sack.”

“God, do you think before you speak or do those words just sit on your tongue all day until you talk to me.”

“Well, I can’t say that stuff in front of girls.”

The two laughed and stopped at the curb of the sidewalk, looking for traffic that might be traveling down the road they were just about to cross.

“There was another murder last night.” Craig said as they started crossing the road. “They didn’t find out about it until late this morning.”

“Where was it?” Jonathan asked.

“West of here,” Craig answered, “about half-way from here to the last murder. They said it was the same style of killing; large knife, but no evidence of one being taken or left behind.”

“That’s odd,” Jonathan said stopping to think. “You didn’t happen to drive my car anywhere, did you?”

“You’ve got to be joking, right?” Craig said with a slight laugh. “You wouldn’t even let your own mother drive that car.”

“I got in it this morning and half a tank of gas was just gone. Almost enough to drive 40 miles two ways.” Jonathan said looking around.

“You think I took your car?” Craig asked.

“I think somebody took my car.”

“What’s wrong with you? You seem jumpy and paranoid about something.”

Jonathan looked around again then leaned in close to Craig. “It’s these murders and that...that freak in the black.”

“Have you seen him again?”

“No, but I just can’t shake the idea that all of it is connected somehow.” Jonathan reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He unfolded it slowly, revealing a drawing, sketched in pencil, of what looked like a Japanese katana. “I found this in one of my notebooks yesterday.” He said showing it to Craig.

Craig took the paper and studied it. “Yeah,” he said handing it back, “it’s called a doodle. I do it all the time.”

“This is different,” Jonathan said, “I don’t remember drawing it, but I remember a bunch of details.”

“What more can there be than this?”

Jonathan folded the paper up and put it in his pocket and continued walking towards the Village.

“It’s called the Shadow Blade,” Jonathan said referring to the drawing.

“Sounds like something out of a sci-fi comic.” Craig mumbled.

Jonathan ignored the comment and continued, “It’s made of some type of new metal. I think the name was *Onyx Steel* or something like that.”

They turned the corner and stopped at the door outside of Carter’s Hot Dogs. Jonathan reached out for the door handle, but Craig stopped him.

“Listen, Jonathan,” he said softly, “it’s just a doodle. There’s nothing special about it. It doesn’t mean anything. You probably drew it while half asleep in your calculus class, that’s why you don’t remember drawing it, but remember the facts.”

Jonathan pulled the door open with an angered jerk. Craig backed away a little and gave a concerned look to Jonathan, whom did not seem to notice. After a second of waiting, Craig walked into the eatery and Jonathan followed, letting the door slowly close behind them.

Jonathan spent the rest of the afternoon in the dorm room on his computer. When he was not looking up information about the local murders he was sending instant messages to friends around the state. He asked them questions about what they had heard about the murders and if they were on the same campus if they had seen a man dressed in all black that stayed back in the shadows. Nobody had any more answers than he already had. Jonathan’s search seemed to be frivolous.

It was close to eight o’clock when Craig got back from spending time with other friends. He walked in the room and set his bag down. Jonathan was leaning back in his computer chair, staring half-minded towards his computer monitor.

“Jesus,” Craig said stepping around the couch in the middle of the room, “have you been there all afternoon?”

“Just about,” Jonathan answered, “what time is it?”

“Just after eight. You need to go out and get some fresh air.”

Jonathan stretched his arms over his head then rubbed his eyes. “That really doesn’t sound like a bad idea.”

Jonathan stood up and grabbed his coat from the closet. He began to walk out but remembered that he forgot his keys. Craig picked them up off the edge of the desk and tossed them to Jonathan.

“Don’t wait up for me,” Jonathan said jokingly.

“Don’t bring home any strange girls,” Craig said non-jokingly.

Jonathan walked slowly along the sidewalk, making sure to pass directly under the lamps casting purple-yellow glows along the cracked gray surface. So far he had not seen the man dressed in black, but he had only been out for less than twenty minutes. A cold chill ran down Jonathan’s spine, making him shiver a bit. He looked behind him

again, expecting to see the man in black, leaning casually against the lamp post or a tree. He saw nothing. He shoved his hands into the pockets of the black leather coat he was wearing.

This night was slightly colder than the previous nights had been. A good sign that the fall months were moving in and winter was soon to follow. Jonathan had always liked the fall. It marked a time of change. The leaves on the trees began to die, and as they did, their colors changed, their exteriors wrinkled, they fell to the ground, giving in to the inevitable cycle that is begotten to them all from their very creation in the spring. Mostly, for Jonathan, it gave him a chance to find a cute girl and snuggle up with her out on the lawn and take in the beautiful array of oranges and yellows that befall the trees surrounding campus. After all, he was a guy.

Another chill crawled up Jonathan's spine. It hadn't even reached his neck before he heard a voice behind him. He turned around quickly, almost too quickly, slightly losing his balance. There was nobody there. A few hundred feet behind him was a couple walking hand-in-hand, laughing slightly to each other. Jonathan could hear their laughter and assumed that it was the boyfriend's voice he had heard behind him, making him wobble around in anticipation of another encounter. He turned back around slowly only to see the man in black, a few yards ahead of him, leaning against a lamp post, same as he was the first time Jonathan had seen him.

Jonathan swore that man had not been there only second prior to him turning around. It was physically impossible for him to have run to such position and be there calmly in the short time span he had while Jonathan was turned around. He must have been in the shadows behind the light, waiting and watching for the right moment. But how did he know that the moment would be at this particular location, at this particular time? The man looked up from the ground, his brimmed hat still hiding his face in darkness. Jonathan had to hand it to this guy; he knew how to keep hidden.

Jonathan stopped and looked at the man, who had taken his cue that Jonathan was not going to walk any further, so had started walking in his direction. The black coat draped around his body billowed in the wind created by his movement. Jonathan could see that not only was the man wearing a black coat, but black pants, shirt and shoes. It was obvious now, since the man was not leaning against a post or standing on higher ground than Jonathan, that the two were identical in height, but it was still hard to tell with the brimmed hat over the dark figure's head. The man stopped only a few yards from Jonathan and stood in an open stance.

"You've seen it," the man said, "haven't you?"

"Seen what?" Jonathan asked, hands still in his pockets.

"How I'm going to help you," the dark figure retorted in an almost proud emphasis.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about."

"I told you I would show you. I've showed you twice so far. Are you that blind?"

Jonathan looked around. Nobody else was in the same area. It was almost as if the entire campus deserted itself when this dark man appeared. "I don't understand." He said after a turning back to the man.

“Look closer at the facts that lay before you.” The man said spreading his hands out. Jonathan could see that the man was also wearing black leather gloves. Not uncommon for this time of year.

“The murders?” Jonathan asked quietly, as if unsure about himself.

“Yes!” exclaimed the figure. “Now you’re catching on.”

“I don’t understand,” Jonathan said, “what do our random meetings have to do with the murders?”

“Nothing is totally random,” the man said, “everything has a reason. I had a reason. I needed to show you, I needed to come to you in the only way that you would pay attention.”

“You killed those people?” Jonathan asked.

“Of course I did.” The man said proudly. “Damn good job of it too. I hear the police are still having trouble finding a motive.”

“You’re a sick bastard,” Jonathan said, “I’m calling the police to turn you in.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Watch me,” Jonathan said turning around and walking away.

“You have yet to see it.” The man called after him. “You have the potential to do great things Jonathan.”

With the sound of his name, Jonathan froze his movement. How did this freak know his name? Another chill ripped through Jonathan’s body. A cold sweat beaded on his forehead. This man, dressed in black, knew who Jonathan was, admitted to killing at least two people, and now was standing behind Jonathan.

“Terrible things, I’m afraid,” the man continued, “but great things nonetheless.”

Jonathan was unable to move to face the man, but he could feel the figure approaching him, drawing closer. There was a small sound, as if a flat of steel was being dragged along a leather strap, a crisp ring at the end as metal collided with metal for a brief second and resonated down a shaft. Time seemed to slow down. Jonathan could feel that his demise was approaching him. He slowly turned around to see the glint of light off of a steel blade slide past the figure’s body toward Jonathan.

Jonathan closed his eyes and prepared his body for the hit of the blade. His arms tightened, his body slowly arched to the right to lessen the impact of the blow, and his teeth ground into each other. Just when Jonathan thought the sharp side of the sword in the killer’s hand should have been hitting his body there was the sharp twang of steel hitting steel. Jonathan opened his eyes to see another figure, dressed in black as well, standing between Jonathan and the killer, a sword in his hands, blocking the edge of the killer’s sword from hitting Jonathan. The other figure only said one thing. The tone of his voice, cold and solid, gave Jonathan another chill. “Go!”