

The Hermit

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Prologue

2037.12.21 East Asia.

A year before the Blind.

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In a dark cave. A group of people is carefully walking. Like they are avoiding some scary creature in this place. One person walks in the first position—Grey hair, scar on his face, and a cigarette in his mouth. Several soldiers keep talking to him. It seems like he takes control of this crew.

Several minutes later. A giant but lost pyramid appears under the protection of veins.

"This is it?"

That commander asks.

"Yes, sir. We are here."

"The lost civilization. The marth. It really does exist."

A young man says excitedly

"Great. Let the Tech team come in and do work."

The commander drops the cigarettes and talks to a soldier aside.

In seconds, a team comes in and puts all kinds of technology equipment around the pyramid. The lost architecture is soon covered with steel. Like a steel monster. The commander quietly watches the decoration works of the pyramid. Probably the most crucial decoration in human history. But he just stands there, quietly, like he's not the one who just made the order.

"What a gorgeous masterpiece. Isn't it, son?"

The commander suddenly talks. To the void.

Surprisingly, a sound appears from the void.

"Yes. Father."

Gradually, a shadow gate appears from the commander's back. And a young teen walks from it. Nothing in this world can be weirder than this scene. But none of the soldiers show surprise. Like they know it will happen a long time ago.

"After five years, we finally found the Marth." The commander is still looking at the pyramid. The Tech team has almost finished their work.

"Yes. Father." The young teen with black jackets all over him replies. Without any emotion.

"Can you see?"

"Almost, father. I can feel the constraint. It's not far from breaking it."

"Good. Son. Good. You need to break it before Blink. And become the leader of the dark age."

"Yes, Father."

They continue their dialogue. But no one can understand it.

"But dad. When the Blink comes, you will..."

Rarely, the young teen looks at the commander while talking and show some emotion on his face.

"Don't worry about me. I have my plan. The Blink won't be a big problem for me."

Not a big problem. So that means there will be some trouble. The young teen thinks quietly. But he can't say anything. He knows his father. Well enough to understand the word behind. His father has something more important to do. And he doesn't want him to be a part of it.

"You need to focus on the gate, son," The commander keeps saying. "You have a tougher goal than me."

"I understand, father." The young teen replies. And there's no more voice coming after this.

Several minutes later, the intercom suddenly breaks the deadly silence.

"Everything is ready, sir. We are waiting for you."

The commander slowly takes the intercom and talks in a soft tone that no one expects.

"I'm coming. Everyone quits to the safe zone. We don't know what will happen."

"But sir, then you will..." The intercom soon speaks, full of worries.

"...I have my duty. I know what it costs." The commander still talks calmly.

"... Understood, boss. We are coming out right now. ETA 2 minutes."

The commander then through the intercom to the ground and gradually walks to the pyramid. The shadow gate still remains open, and the young teen is standing in front of it and watching his dad walk toward the pyramid. Or his grave.

The commander stops in front of the entrance. And suddenly shouts without turning his head.

"Go back to where you should be, son. Get prepared. You don't have much time left."

"I will be alive, or I will be dead. But I'm not the protagonist. You are!"

"My duty is cleaning all the obstacles for you! And I did it! Now it's your round!"

"Remember. The darkness will pass, the bright will come."

The young teen stands still and watches the commander disappear in the pyramid. Like the steel monster eats him quietly. He then quickly turns around and disappears into the shadow gates. If someone stands next to him, he might see the tears in the air.

"I know, dad."

"I won't let you down."

"I will do what I should do."

"I will be the leader of this generation."

"I'm... Visionary."

Chapter I The Fool

"It's been a long time."

"Two years? Three years?"

"I can't remember. I was counting each day and tried to form a system or something to help me remember the day. But it didn't work out. It's hard to know when the day ends without knowing when is the day and when is the night."

"I wish we could still use Calendar."

"Calendar means nothing in this new era. There's no sound from it; it's dead."

"Two years ago, everyone on the Earth heard one loud voice at the same time. No one could accurately describe what the voice was saying. At least no one around me. But after several arguments, well, the argument is a really soft word to describe it, but anyway, people reached a general conclusion that the voice was saying a word from Buddhism. I know nothing about Buddhism, so I don't know what the word is."

"But the outcome of this voice is deadly. Only one thing happened to humankind, all of them lost their visuals. In other words, no one is able to see, including me."

"Millions of people died when this happened. Car accidents, Plane accidents, Falling from buildings. Everything, everything becomes deadly without visions. Only those who were

doing nothing survived. Luckily I was one of them. I was sleeping when Blink happened. Oh, Blink is the name people give to it. I don't know why they name a sound with Blink. But people do weird things. Anyway..."

Suddenly, a bell voice interrupts Richard.

He is sitting on the bed and holding a voice recorder in his hands. After hearing the bell, Richard sighs and press buttons on the recorder.

"Anyway, I have to do the Check. They are coming again. Diary 03 ends."

Richard turns off the recorder and puts it on the desk in front of him. The desk is shaky and old; many scratches decorate its surface like someone has a hard time using the desk.

Richard takes a rod next to him and stands up. He's in a bedroom with only one bed and a desk. There is trash all over the place and many things that broke up: cups, mirrors, even a computer. Weirdly, nothing relates to food.

Richard holds the rod and keeps knocking on the floor with it. However, he walks straight toward the door without any hesitation and opens the door.

Outside the door, two strong men wearing black suits are standing with their eyes opened. Both of them are holding a steel cane.

When Richard opens the door, both of them immediately look at Richard, more precisely, look at his closing eyes. They stare at Richard and say nothing. They just stand there and wait until Richard breaks the silence with confusion.

"I thought I heard the bell.....We are not doing Check today?"

While saying this, Richard steps back and tries to close the door.

Those two men do nothing until the door is almost closed.

"Sorry. We are here. It takes me some time to walk those stairs. My old rod was missing, so I have to get a new one." Surprisingly, one of the strong men talks in a very soft tone. Probably no one is able to relate his voice with his muscles.

Richard reopens the door and smiles to his front. "That's fine, Kane. I almost closed my door. I almost think the bell sound is an illusion. Oh, is P here with you, Kane?"

"Oh yeah, I bring him with me. Let me make him say hello to you." The strong man is saying without any facial expression. After several seconds, the other man suddenly says

"WOOF!"

The bark is just like it's from a real dog. It's the weirdest thing in the world of seeing the strong man bark.

Richard keeps smiling and says to his front. "Good Boy P. Good Boy. Sorry I don't have any food for you today."

The first strong guy replies still in a soft tone, without any emotion showing on his face.

"Oh, it's fine, Richard. He will find something for himself. Let's do the Check right now. What do you need until next week?"

"Ah, let me think, I probably need some food...."

While Richard and the strong man are talking, the man who just barked quietly walks into the room. He quickly examines the bedroom and walks around without making any sound. He even carefully checks all the trash on the floor. The man who's talking with Richard stares at him until he finishes checking the trash and shakes his head back to him. The strong man nods his head unnoticeably and focuses back on the conversation with Richard.

During the whole process, Richard is just standing there and talking with the strong man. Just like he doesn't notice any of the things.

"...and some water. I think that will be enough for me this week."

The strong man keeps his soft tone: "I got them. You do not require a lot, as always. We should be able to send those to you by tomorrow...Oh, sorry, I forget there's no tomorrow right now. I will make sure the bell is rung when the supply is here."

Richard keeps smiling: "That will be the best. Thank you, Kane. Is there anything you need to know?"

The strong man watches his crewmate walk quietly outside the door and replies: "That will be enough for today, Richard. I will talk to you next time."

Without waiting for a reply, he closes the door, walks downstairs, and keeps knocking the steel cane to the floor.

After several minutes of silence, he asks his colleague in a serious tone.

"What do you find?"

"Nothing new. There's no clue showing he woke up."

The strong guy nods his head. "Same for me. There's no sign showing he knows you exist. All the conversation is normal. Put him as normal on the list."

"Yes. Sir." After finishing changing the list, they walk toward the other building with the cane in their hands but not touching the floor.

But none of them notice that from the room they just checked, there's an eye staring at them.

"..... It's the fourth time they have come." Richard sighs. "Why do they pretend they can't see?"

"....Thanks to that note. No matter what they want, it won't be a good thing."

Richard closes the curtain and walks back to his bed without using any tool.

He takes the recorder and pushes the record button.

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After several seconds of silence, Richard starts speaking

"New Diary. Diary four."

"Black suits just left. As always, they wear black suits. That's why I call them this way. I have never seen them change their clothes. Maybe it's their uniform? Or it has some special things that can protect them? But what can threaten them? After all, when people can't see, they also can't fight."

"As usual, the interrogator pretends he came with a dog, and the searcher pretends to be his dog. Why do they do it this way? Just to test whether I can see?... Well, this makes sense. I almost laughed out loud the first time I met them. That can explain something. He comes into my room to find any sign that I can see."

"I don't think they start doubting me. The searcher found nothing, and I replied to the interrogator perfectly. Their colors are also normal. But just in case, I might need to stay here for another check....."

"Anyway, back to where I finished in Diary three."

"The two years after Blink were a nightmare. Life without vision was extremely terrible and hard. I can't count how many times I want to kill myself and escape from the darkness. I could do nothing. Luckily, some people found a way to live safely. Well, safe really only means not dying nowadays. I mentioned them in Diary I, and I will say more in future diaries. I have to say thank you to whoever created it. It saves me countless times."

"But after two years living in darkness, something changed."

"I can still remember that day. I woke up as usual. And suddenly, I realized one thing."

"I can see."

Chapter II The Tower

Richard takes a deep breath, looks out the window.

"I don't know why I don't know-how. I suddenly have my vision back. I'm able to see the tree, sky, clouds, everything. I never realized the ability to see is such a miracle gift we have. Even my broken room seems gorgeous to me."

"I was curious about the reasons, and I was trying to figure out. But one thing grabbed my attention and forced me to give up all thoughts in my head."

Richard's body is shaking, and his tone becomes a lot softer.

"Everywhere in my room, all the walls, corners, desks, chairs, everywhere, had one sentence on it."

"Don't tell them you can see."

Richard takes another deep breath. The moment he tries to speak again, several knocks from the door interrupts him. Richard has to press the stop button again and walks toward the room.

Richard doesn't forget about his rod. At this moment, he's still a blind person to most other people. But who is this? Richard thinks. He's sure black suits are away from his room. He 'sees' them walk toward the next building and leave the area, and Richard is sure he made no mistake.

But who's knocking on the door then? Richard is confused. He takes the rod and makes his eyes pale. He has to be careful; there's no other choice. He doesn't figure out why he's able to get vision again, and he's sure it will be a terrible thing if other people know it.

Richard walks slowly toward the door and thinks about all the possible conditions, but none of them makes sense. It's only been several weeks since he can see, and most of the time, he's hiding what he can do. He doesn't know what happened to this world and himself.

Richard finally stands in front of the door and opens it slowly.

There's nobody here.

Richard is shocked, but he tries his best not to show it to anyone who might look at him.

He's sure the knock is knocked, and he hears it. Two years without vision gives him a great ear; it's the only thing he can rely on in this era, after all. Richard says hello and waits for several seconds, as he usually does when people knock on his door. Of course, no one answers,

and then he slowly steps back, murmurs while closing the door. Anyone who sees this will be sure he's blind, and he really should get an Oscars reward if people are still doing that.

When Richard closes the door and turns around, cold sweat falls from his forehead all the sudden. Nobody knows what he saw when he opened the door. Or rather than saying see, feel is probably the better verb. Several weeks ago, when Richard could open his eyes again, he found that there was something different with his eyes. It's hard to describe what exactly he can do, but basically, he can see a person's mind in colors. It was the first check he did after getting his vision back. He opened the door as he usually did, and the thing he saw scared him. He saw two people at first, which was already a surprise since he always thought it was one man and one dog. It took some time for him to figure out who they were. But the thing that really scares him is the colors over the two black suits' heads. The colors were black. Like two black clouds were covering their minds and thoughts. Richard didn't know what those were and was really shocked. The two black suits immediately recognized his facial expressions and became suspicious of him. And that's really why those two men keep doing Check with Richard. When they became suspicious, the color immediately changed from black to purple. And this gave Richard more shock. It takes Ricard several weeks to have a basic knowledge of it. Those colors represent people's mind or their thoughts. But they will only appear in color, and there are thoughts that share one color. Even until now, Richard is not able to fully understand what happened to him.

But none of those shocks can compare to what he just saw.

Richard can't control himself anymore and slowly sits down on the floor against the wall.

Up his head is the window. There is nothing outside there. But in Richard's eye, there are black words and sentences all around the place. Covering all the space and making the city a dark city. Upside the sky, there's one line above every other character.

"DON'T TELL THEM YOU CAN SEE"

And this is what makes Richard scared. There's no light, no living creature but only darkness everywhere. If one takes a close look at them, he can see those words are all from the line in the sky.

"What....What I saw," Richard murmured to himself. And his body is still shaking.

After several minutes, when Richard calms down a bit, or when he thinks he calms down, he puts his hands on the windowsill and supports his body to stand up. He carefully opens his eyes again and steals a glance out of the window.

The sky is blue, and the sun is bright.

No darkness. No words. Nothing. Like everything is just Richard's dream.

Richard looks out the window and freezes. He's sure he was awakened, and he saw all the things. But the reality in front of him confuses him. For a moment, he can't tell the difference between the real world and illusion. Maybe everything is just a dream. The black suits, two years without vision, the Blink, everything. Richard can't control his thoughts. His life becomes weird when he doesn't even realize it.

No, Richard does realize it; he just refuses to admit it. Richard knows from his deep heart that the world is shifted, and his life is inevitably affected.

But Richard just refuses to think about it.

Maybe because he's tired of weird things, maybe the happiness of regaining his vision makes him ignore all the bad things in life. Richard has to admit that two years of life without vision is way tougher than he describes. He can't tell how many times he tried to suicide, and he really tried. But for some reason, none of the attempts work for him. It's almost like the god of destiny wants him to live and sees him suffer in this terrible world. Richard smiles silently. Maybe for his terrible life.

Richard knows the world is different. From the day the Blink happened, he realized something had changed, and it will never get back. Richard has been a smart person since he was a child. Interestingly he's not the kind of good person that others think. He never puts in more effort than anyone else, but he's just better than others. He can't explain, but he's just able to think faster than most people. Usually, he has a conclusion when others still try to understand the question. Maybe it's a gift, but Richard hates it. He wants to become a normal person, and that's why he never shows his talent to other people. He enjoys normal life and doesn't want to change a bit of it.

But the appearance of Blink destroys his dream in a brutal way. Two years ago, he wouldn't believe a word if someone said it's possible to see one's thoughts and mental states. In fact, he would probably call an ambulance and send that person to hospital. But it happened to him for several weeks. And he has to accept it with regards to his will.

After seeing the outside world and finding nothing weird is happening, Richard sits back on the floor. He stares at his house and tries to understand the reason behind it. He thinks of all the possible reasons, but none can actually convey himself. It's been a long time since he got no

answer after serious thinking. It makes him a bit down, and he starts getting his head in the clouds again.

"Knock".

Suddenly, the noise from the door drags Richard back to his life. The sound is soft. Richard won't even recognize if there are other sounds in his room. Even the sound of turning a book page is louder than it.

Richard quickly stands up and walks toward the door. It can't be a friendly visit from his neighbors and friends. He doesn't have many friends in this city, and all of them suicided after the Blink because they didn't want to suffer anymore. The same thing happened to his neighbor. An optimistic college girl and ends her life with a knife. Richard couldn't contact his parents after the Blink happened. The phone lost its function for some reason, and there's no other way that doesn't require vision.

He's all by himself in this world.

Richard closes his right eye and looks through the peephole.

Standing outside the door is a young man dressed in black. He wears a black coat with white shirts inside. The coat is long, exceeds his knees, and almost touches the ground. He holds a black cane in his right hand and a package in his left. But the thing that attracts Richard's attention the most is his eyes. His eyes are open and shining with different colors. Gold and blue. He's also wearing a monocle on his right eye, the gold eye. Like it's protecting it from something.

Richard swears to god he never met this guy before, or there's no chance he can't remember him. He doesn't plan to open the door. Even the guy seems nice, but people without cautions can easily die in this era. Nobody tells Richard, but he feels this way. Richard keeps looking through the peephole and pretends there's nobody in this house.

But life won't go with his script. The man suddenly raises his head and looks at the peephole from the outside. Richard suddenly becomes nervous even though the guy isn't supposed to see him through the peephole. The guy smiles and speaks in his soft tone.

"Mr. Richard, right? I'm not coming to hurt you. I'm your friend, not an enemy."

Richard suddenly freezes and can't even move. Like there's a hand grabbing his heart, and his heart will be popped if he dares to move.

The guy outside seems nervous and smiles again.

"Don't worry; there's no danger from me, Mr. Richard. I'm here to talk"

The smile on his face seems bigger.

"About what you saw."

Chapter III The Magician.

Ten minutes later.

Richard doesn't know why he opened the door. He was following his plan carefully until the Victorian-era guy said that sentence. He was shocked for a moment but didn't change his mind about pretending not to be home. But somehow, for reasons that he can't even explain, he opened the door and let that guy in. Richard saw he was smiling when the door opened like he was sure about what would happen.

He walked into the room and sat on the chair without even asking. And Richard didn't realize what was happening until this moment. He didn't know what happened to him. He couldn't think about anything for several minutes, but his body moved without his command. When he's able to control his body again, the man is already in his room on the chair.

Richard feels extreme fear and panic. He wasn't scared when the blink happened; he wasn't scared when he regained vision; he wasn't scared when he saw those two black suits. Even so many weird things happened these years, but at least he's able to understand them. He's able to control himself. But what happened today is totally different. First time in his life, he feels things are out of his control. His talent, even though he hates it, makes him powerful enough to understand the world and react to them in his way. But he can't understand now. He never heard about anything that could control his body without his consent. And he doesn't know what are the black words cover the whole sky. It seems like the world has just entered a new era.

Richard sits cautiously on the floor opposite the Victorian-era guy. Even though he knows there's no way he can resist him, he still tries to be as careful as possible. The Victorian-era guy sees his actions and chuckles. He puts his hat and cane on the desk and raises both arms:

"Don't be scared. I'm not armed. Just like I said, I'm here to talk with you. Not hurt you."

Richard hears his words but doesn't believe them easily. A good thing about living in this world alone is that you can quickly learn not to trust other people. At least not trust them easily. Richard knows it, and he doesn't let his caution gets down.

"Who are you. Why are you looking for me." Richard stops for several seconds and continues. "And how do you know that I can... I can..." Richard recalls the dark sky he saw

earlier, his voice immediately shakes, and he can't even finish the sentence with the great pressure on his heart.

"...you can see the black words cover the sky, right?" The guy sitting on the chair finishes Richard's sentence for him with a smile on his face.

It was him. It was him causing all the weird things. Richard thinks. But why? How?

"Let's talk one thing at a time." The guy is still smiling, speaking in his soft tone, "And don't be so scared. If I want to hurt you, I will do that immediately when I come in. As I said, I just want to talk."

Richard gradually stops being panicked. He grabs another chair and sits opposite the man. He chooses to trust man's words. Not because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the only thing to do.

"So what's your name. And why do you want to talk to me?" Richard tries his best to make himself calm. But anyone can still hear the fear hiding behind those words.

"My name is Dunn." The guy is still smiling. "Dunn Rodriguez."

"And for why I want to talk to you, there's a long story behind it. It includes everything that happens to you. Or to the world. Do you want to hear it or just the short version?"

"I don't mind. Time is the only thing I have nowadays." Richard replies to him immediately. Even though he's still a bit scared, he wants to know the full story. He knows care will kill a cat, but it's not something he can control.

"Okay then, let's talk about the whole story." Dunn sits on the chair and smiles with a cigar between fingers.

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Wait. A cigar? Richard suddenly realizes.

When he takes out the cigar? Richard can swear to God, if there's one, that he stares at Dunn the whole time and not see how the cigar appears.

Dunn continues his words like he doesn't notice Richard's sight.

"Everything started three years ago. The collapse of a relic changes the world forever."

"A relic?"

"Yes. We don't know what the relic is and who caused the collapse. The only thing we can be sure of is that the collapse changes everything."

"So you are saying the collapse caused the blink?"

"For what we know right now. It is."

"But how? How could a relic cause everything? What's that relic about?"

"Before that. Have you heard about H.P Lovecraft? The Call of Cthulhu?"

"Yes. I read it several times. But why?"

Richard is a big fan of literacy. Especially on occultism and mythology. H.P Lovecraft's books are his favorite. He's never a theist. But he did believe in the existence of God, or, in a more precious way, some more powerful creatures. He never believes the fairy tale saying God loves and helps human kinds. A person won't care about the ants he steps on. The same theory applies to God. At least that's what Richard believes. When he first read Lovecraft's works, he was deeply attracted to the world it describes. Desperate, sorrowful, maniac.

Dunn takes a deep breath. His smile slipped away.

"Because it's true."

"....."

"H.P Lovecraft's books are well-decorated truth. Not fiction."

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Dunn's words explode in Richard's head and shock him for many seconds.

For many moments Richard can't even understand the meaning of the words.

Truth? Not fiction? Richard can't even understand what those words mean.

It's true he loves all these novels. But he only likes them because they are novels. Not a documentary or memoir. He once imagined if he lived in Lovecraft's world. And the only outcome he can think of is dying in an obscure corner. He then suddenly hears some weird, crazy murmurs next to his ears. Like someone is talking in his ear, but Richard can't see it.

No. It can't be words from a human being. It has to be something more powerful, more ruthless, more dreadful. Like. Like a monster from another world. Like Cthulhu. Richard's head is full of creepy murmurs when it shows up. He's gradually losing his consciousness and control of his body and mind. He feels like he's falling into a dark, endless abyss. And he will fall to it forever with murmurs. Richard can notice he's gradually falling into something terrible. But he doesn't know what to do.

While Richard is suffering and gradually falling into death, Dunn stands up and stares at his face without any facial expression. His right-hand holds the cane with dark fog covering its

clasp and his fingers. His left hand is holding a deck of poker cards, with jokers on the top of it, smiling at his face. Dunn stares at Richard and thinks aloud in a serious heavy tone.

"Just hearing the name causes the murmur. I thought it would take longer, at least until showing him the picture. It's a good thing he has a high vision. But it will make the murmur the strongest. Which creature is talking to him? I hope it's not Homnaqui or Catholas. Or I have to..." Dunn holds his cane a bit tighter when thinking about this. He's carefully checking Richard's colors through his eyes. From his vision, the colors around Richard are changing rapidly. No sign of stopping.

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Richard is still suffering from the murmur. He tries his best to calm down and stay awake. But the murmur just keeps dragging him to the darkness. When he feels he can't resist anymore and has to open his mind to the murmur. Weird things happened.

Grey fog suddenly appears in his eyes and makes Richard able to think a little bit more. With the sudden help from the fog, Richard is able to again resist the invasion from the murmur. He looks at the grey fog doubtfully and wonders what it is. The fog seems to notice his vision, and it suddenly expands at a terrifying speed and soon covers Richard's eyes and mouth. Before Richard can react to the sudden change, the fog disappears, and everything seems back to normal. With the fog, the murmur also disappears. But Richard can still feel the fog, not through his head, but with his mind. He can feel the fog is somewhere in his head and protect him in a way.

Richard opens his eyes, and until this moment, he realizes his eyes are closed during the whole time. But what about all the things he saw? How can he see something without his eyes opening?

Richard doesn't know. But he does know he almost died. And he's glad he's still alive even though he doesn't know why.

Dunn looks at Richard and sees the color around him gradually change back to normal. He realizes Richard is taking back his consciousness and control of his mind. But Dunn is not relaxed. He didn't know what had happened to Richard. A moment before, Richard is on the edge of becoming a monster, and the next moment, everything is back to normal. Dunn cannot be sure if it's really Richard in front of him. Or a dark soul takes Richard's body and comes down to the world. He holds his cane and poker cards more tightly. And ready to fight at any moment.

Richard gradually opens his eyes, seeing Dunn hold the cane and poker very tight and looking at him warily. Richard doesn't know what happened and why Dunn is guarding him seriously. Richard holds his breath and looks at Dunn again. He sees around Dunn's head, color changes from blue to dark red. This is the method Richard found to see other people's color after he had a vision. After many failures, Richard found that being calm and holding breath can make him see the colors. He tried his best to analyze the colors, but without much information, it's incredibly hard to do. The only thing he is certain about is the blue color means calm, the color red means caution, and the color purple means chaos. He can also see other colors from people's bodies, but he can't figure out what those colors mean.

Right now, Richard knows Dunn is extremely careful and guarding him against the dark red around his head. But why? A moment ago, Dunn was smiling and talking with him peacefully. What happened. Richard looks at Dunn with confusion and wants to stand up and ask him questions. Dunn sees his action and quickly takes several steps back. He's still guarding carefully and asks Richard a weird question/

"Who are you?"

Richard is confused by this sudden question. Who is he? He's Richard, a normal person that was forced into a big storm. Or is it a philosophical question? What does Dunn expect from him? Richard looks at Dunn to check if he hears the question wrong. But the serious face of Dunn notices him that Dunn is serious. Dunn's asking who are you seriously, no matter what it is supposed to mean.

"I...Uh.. I am Richard. You are...Mr. Dunn. Dunn Rodri...Rodriguez, if I am right."

Dunn still looks at Richard cautiously, but apparently, he feels something, and he gradually lets his guard down. Richard still freezes at his position. He tries his best to calm down, but after experiencing all those things, it's kind of hard for him to do it. He doesn't know what happened to him just now, but he can be sure that it's not something he knows and something good. But he's already dragged into the storm. He's not able to leave at this point. He just hopes Dunn can understand that he's not crazy and explains everything for him. Luckily, his prayer seems to be working. Dunn finally stopped guarding. He murmurs several sentences and suddenly opens his hand and lets the cane fall to the ground. Out of Richard's expectations, the cane doesn't follow Newton's first law and falls straight to the ground. The cane just stands on

the ground straight, like there's a hand holding it from the void. Dunn clearly breathes a sigh of relief and sits back to the chair. Richard looks at Dunn and just realizes that his shirt is soaked with sweat like he just experienced a fight. Dunn releases his left hand and lets the poker card fall down. Weirdly, those cards don't fall down and touch the ground. Instead, they burn and vanish in the middle of the air.

Richard is surprised about all the things he sees. So many, too many things happened in the past thirty seconds, and he has a bunch of questions he wants to ask. The poker cards, the cane, the murmur he heard, the black suit, the color he sees, and the blink. Richard doesn't know why but he's certain that Dunn knows something. But now, it's clearly not the best moment to ask. Dunn is still sitting on the chair and trying to recover. Richard doesn't know what Dunn experienced while he heard the murmur, but it seems to take a great effort to do. Richard decides to sit down and wait until Dunn is fine. Time is probably the only thing he has right now, and he doesn't mind using them without a purpose. He sits on the chair and looks at Dunn, patiently waiting for him.

It seems like Dunn feels his vision, he takes another deep breath and sits straight, has the same smile when he first enters the room on his face and says

"Congratulations, Richard. You are still survived."

Chapter IV The World.

Survived? Means it's possible for me to die? Richard is acutely aware of the words unwritten. He looks at Dunn and can no longer control his curiosity and worry.

"Rodriguez..."

"You can just call me Dunn. Or Captain Dunn if you want to" Dunn smiles.

"Okay..Uh, Captain Dunn. Can you explain what happened to me? What are the things I just heard and all the things I saw these days? I'm happy I got my vision back, but I don't want to die without knowing the reason."

Dunn looks at Richard, takes out a cigar, again Richard has no idea where it comes from, lights it, and takes a deep drag on it. Smoke gradually escapes from his body and forms a wall covering his head. Behind the smoke, Dunn speaks slowly.

"I can explain everything. But not in detail; for some of them, I don't even know the right truth. I will continue where I left, H.P Lovecraft, and tell you the truth I know."

The truth he knows? Why is he adding that? Richard notices Dunn's words. Does that mean the truth he knows isn't necessarily the right one?

Before Richard keeps thinking, Dunn continues.

"The origin is complicated, and none of the people can actually explain it clearly. But the one thing people all agree with is that H.P Lovecraft's books are real. Those creatures do exist and look at us. They have power that humankind cannot understand; their breath can kill thousands of normal people. We are not able to see them except through several unique rites. But the people who attend those rites are mostly dead, so these riots are banned for normal people."

Richard frowns, he captures several words from Dunn's sentences that make no sense to him.

"Wait. Normal people?" Richard looks at Dunn in confusion.

"Are there not normal people? Also, if we are not able to see those creatures, they are so powerful. How do you know so many things about them? How does that make Lovecraft's works real?" Richard can't understand. If a creature is that powerful and able to decide people's death easily, just saying his name and looking at him is disrespectful. God can't be seen.

"I know your questions. I used to have the same ones." The smoke has dissipated a lot. Richard can now see Dunn's vague figure, but still not his face. Dunn's voice passed through the smoke.

"Let's save the first one for later. I will answer you the second one about Lovecraft."

After several seconds of silence, Richard hears Dunn's voice again

"Because we saw him. Alive."

Saw? Alive? For a second Richard is not able to understand those words. They are so familiar but so strange. No way, How could he...? Wait..What? After getting in shock for several minutes, Richard finally gets back to reality. He can no longer calm down and asks Dunn in a hurry.

"What...What are you talking about? H.P died long ago. He passed away in....in..."

"In 1937, March the fifteenth." Dunn finishes Richard's sentence.

"I know it's hard to believe. But this is the reality. Around three or four years ago, H.P Lovecraft found us." Dunn speaks in a slow tone. But every single word he says shocks Richard.

"We recognize him, and none of us know what happened to the world. Many of us thought this was just a prank, but after many tests, we confirmed that person is Lovecraft."

Richard gradually calms down and hears Dunn's words. It was a great shock when he first heard all these things. But after everything he experienced today, he suddenly finds all the words Dunn says credible. After everything that happened these months, he knows the world is way more complicated than he thought, and there are many more things hidden under the water, probably terrible things. Richard keeps listening to Dunn's words.

"He said nothing that day. It just handed us a book and left. None of us is able to stop it. Like on that day, we had to allow him to leave, and we could defy it."

It? Whose it? Richard suddenly realizes Dunn changes the pronoun. But Dunn doesn't give him an opportunity to ask.

"From the book, we know the truth about the world, including all the things I just told you. There are many other things that happened around the world that were hardly believed. But all of them have proved true these years."

"These years?" Richard suddenly asks, "I think everyone loses vision from the Blink? Or it's just a group of people." Without realizing it, Richard is gradually thinking about the world in a new way. Dunn nods his head slightly as if admiring his question.

"Yes. The Blink only affects normal people. There's a group of people who can still retain their vision after the Blink. And btw, I think you can guess it at this point; the Blink is caused by an ancient creature. It meant no harm. It just said a word to one of our people."

Just a breath. Richard thinks about it. He can now understand what Dunn means by a powerful creature. If a breath can make millions of people blind, then a cough can cause everyone to die. Well, if it can cough. Somehow, Richard starts thinking randomly. Suddenly, he starts to fear. It's fine if he doesn't know any truth about the world and becomes blind for two years, but once he knows the truth, he's suddenly afraid of dying. Die for nothing. He wants to be stronger if there's a way. Before he asks, Dunn's voice appears again.

"Okay. Let's stop talking about the truth of the world. That's all I can say for now. You may be able to read more documents if you join us. But remember, the more you read, the closer you are to these creatures. And no one can guarantee what might happen if you know all the truth and stand right in front of them." Dunn's voice becomes serious all of a sudden.

Richard nods his head seriously. He won't do it. Not until he's powerful enough.

...

Wait. What does Dunn just say? If I join them? Richard suddenly realizes he missed a very important piece of information. He asks Dunn in a hurry.

"Wait, you said if I join you? I join you? Who are you?"

Dunn chuckles. Gradually wave his hand to get rid of all the smoke.

"That's why I'm here, Richard. My mission today is to ask you if you want to join us. But before I ask that. I feel like I need to explain what has changed in this world and what you can do." Dunn stands up, walks slowly around the room.

Richard is scared. He doesn't dare to move, or he can't even feel his finger when he sees Dunn's face. He can't even listen to his words. He's in a great shock.

Dunn's face is changed, changed to Richard's face, and Richard has no idea what happened. Is he dead? Is he alive? Who is he? Richard looks at Dunn standing up with his face and walking around. Suddenly Richard also realizes Dunn becomes the same height as him, and all the other body details are changed to the same as his. If there's another person here, he will only marvel at how similar the twins are. Even Richard can't recognize the person standing in front of him. Dunn? Or himself?

Dunn seems like he didn't notice Richard's shock and fear, continuing to say while looking outside the window.

"After reading Lovecraft's book, everyone suddenly lost their vision the next day. You might still see the news that was written about us. Of course, the news will provide a reason to cover the truth. We were all in panic at that time, and nobody knew what we should do. It's Lovecraft again sending us a message. 'Wait'. So we followed his words. And around a week later, we are all gradually getting our vision back."

It sounds like the same thing happened to me. Richard thinks quietly.

"We were all very happy that time. Even though we don't know what happened. And after several days, weird things start happening to us. We all somehow suddenly had special powers. Some of us can teleport in a range, some can control fire, some can force someone to do certain things, etc." Richard listens to Dunn very carefully. His heart is pumping at a great speed. He can dimly guess what Dunn will say next, but he can't be sure until Dunn really says it.

"We were excited, but we don't know why we had them." Dunn continues and keeps looking through the window. What Richard can't see is that his face is quickly changing.

"The next day, Lovecraft sent us a note. It's probably the most important thing we ever received." Dunn turns around and looks at Richard with a smile. Unknowingly, he changes back to his face. Richard doesn't feel fear anymore, but only curiosity.

"The note introduces us to twenty-two different paths that human-being can grow up and become powerful. Each path has nine sequences, from nine to one. We will be powerful enough to fight with those ancient creatures if we reach sequence one. And that day, we all became sequence nine of different paths." Dunn continues smiling and looks at Richard.

Richard can hardly hide his excitement. He tries his best to calm down, but he can't. He can almost be certain about why Dunn is coming today after hearing all these. But he wants to be a hundred percent sure.

"S....So. You came today is for....for..."

Dunn looks at him and continues smiling.

"After many tests, we are certain about one thing. Only people that become blind and regain their vision are able to become one of the visionaries and become one of the sequence nine." Dunn stops for several seconds and continues

"Richard, we are certain you already have some special power, and we want to invite you to be a part of us." Dunn's smile vanishes; instead, he becomes extremely serious. But Richard fails to notice all those. The only thought in his mind is that he's able to become more powerful and protect himself. He's so excited, and he even forgets to reply to Dunn.

"Seems like you agree." Dunn still has his serious face on.

"Can I know what special power you have? So I can make sure which path you are."

Richard finally realizes there's another person in this room and quickly answers his question.

"I can see colors from people's bodies—their heads, arms, and legs, everywhere. I can see many colors stack around them. Mostly blue and red, but also green and orange sometimes. I assume those colors around their heads mean their mental states, but I don't know what other colors mean."

After listening to Richard's description, Dunn thinks a little bit and looks back at Richard.

"Sounds similar to The Hermit path. Its sequence nine is named Apprentice. I think all different colors mean different conditions of their body parts. Darker the color, the worse the condition is. I don't know much about The Hermit path, but I will find you some books to read

later. Also, since I recruited you, you are on my team now. You can call me Captain Dunn from now. I will explain what we do afterward."

"Yes, Captain Dunn, it's my honor," Richard replies to Dunn quickly and immediately asks him a question that has been in his mind for a long time. "Captain. I saw dark words in the sky this morning, and they disappeared quickly. The words are 'Don't tell them you can see.'. Are those coming from you, sir?" Finally, Richard asks this question which bothers him the whole day. He thinks it's Dunn's work, but he has to be sure just in case.

"Oh yes. That's my power." Dunn gives Richard the answer he wants to hear.

"I'm Magician path, sequence seven, Joker. That's one of my powers. I'm also able to change my outfit to anyone I've seen." Richard immediately remembered just minutes ago, Dunn changed his outfit to him. It seems like Dunn is preparing to tell him the truth from that point.

"And who are you mentioning with that message? The black suits."

"Yes. They are our enemy and our main target. They are also visionary but step on completely opposite paths. I will explain their story to you later. It's our main job after all."

Completely opposite path? Means there are more paths in the word? Richard takes notes in his mind and saves them for future questions. He has the illusion that he just entered a new world, and the old world is all disappeared.

...

Maybe it's not an illusion. Richard suddenly remembered a sentence he read before "When you choose a door, the path behind will vanish. You only have one road to go throughout your whole life". Richard doesn't know why he recalls this sentence, but the content gives him a bad feeling. It seems he just made an extremely important decision without thinking anything. This is unusual. This is not him. For every decision in his life, Richard will think multiple times before he makes a decision. What's wrong with him today? Richard doesn't know. He suddenly became afraid. His instinct tells him that someone forces him to make the decision without his consent and without letting him know. That person, or creature, just pushes him forward, makes him pass through the door, and shuts down all the road behind him.

While Richard is thinking around and becoming afraid, Dunn looks at him very seriously.

"Richard, there's one question I need to ask you."

It's the first time Dunn is so serious when asking him a question. Richard becomes a bit nervous and ready for the question from Dunn.

"During the murmur, which name did you hear? Don't say the full name, just the first letter."

Richard pauses for a moment and starts to recall his memory. In fact, he always remembers that name. But he's afraid of recalling that experience again. It's too weird and painful for him. Everything just sticks to his mind, and he's not able to get rid of them. He hesitated for several seconds, writing the letter with his finger in the air.

"H"

Dunn's eyes shrink immediately when he sees the letter. He looks at Richard shockingly for several seconds and back to normal. But his facial expression becomes even more serious.

Richard notices all the changes on Dunn's face, and his heart keeps falling down. He can tell from Dunn's reaction that the name he hears is very terrible and will cause danger to him.

Dunn takes a deep breath and talks again.

"Richard, don't say that name anywhere, anytime. Not until you reach sequence four. Or you will vanish immediately."

Richard seriously nods his head. He doesn't know why sequence four is the turning point for him. But he's only in sequence one. It's too early for him to think about it. Dunn sees Richard nod his head and continues.

"The name you heard is the name of one of the ancient creatures. I don't know why you can hear his name at this early stage. But you have to be careful now. Once you step on this road, death is the best end for you."

Richard becomes even more scared. He's certain that he doesn't make the decision for himself and some other thing pushes him into this mysterious, dangerous path. No matter how it started, Richard is already on the path. There's no way back; going front is the only thing he can do.

Dunn's voice doesn't stop but keeps going.

"There's one more word I need to say to you."

Dunn takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and reopens after several seconds. His voice raises up with his eye.

"When you look at the abyss, the abyss is looking back at you."

Suddenly, Richard can't feel anything. Everything around him disappears at a great speed. Those grey fog appears again in his vision and soon surrounds him with a circle. Richard is in a

panic about all the changes around him. He blinks, and all the sudden, things appear in front of me. There's a typical long dining table in front of him with twelve wing chairs. Richard is standing at the end of the table. On the other end, there are several stairs up to a giant throne. There's a figure sitting on the throne who is covered by thick grey fog. Richard can barely see the figure, but he can still tell it's a man-kind creature sitting on the throne. Its arm holds its right cheek and directly stares at Richard. With the vision, Richard feels all his body parts are frozen, and he's not able to make a singer gesture. At the same time, Richard is in a great panic, the figure covered by fog chuckles and speaks in a low voice.

“Welcome. HERMIT”

Chapter

It's a kid's room with many many pink dolls and decorations. Anyone can easily tell this is a room for a sweet little angel. And they are right. The little angel is now lying on her bed, with all her body hiding under the quilt, and only her head is out. She's staring at the young man sitting next to her bed. The young man is handsome and has a gentle smile on his face. In his hands is a thick, closed note. The note is very old, and the words on it can be barely recognized. It seems like the young man was reading the note to the little girl, and the little girl is happy with the story she just heard. The little girl keeps begging the young man to read one more story for her, but the young man just shakes his head gently and covers the quilt for the girl. Weirdly, even though they are obviously talking with each other, no voice appears in this room. Just two people keep opening and closing their mouths.

Suddenly, someone knocks on the door and opens it. It's another young handsome guy. He puts his arms to the sides and makes a deep bowl.

“Master. The Hermit will arrive in minutes. You can start the rite now.”

His master gently nods his head, kisses the little girl's forehead and walks out of the room. When he closes the door, a voice appears

“Good night. My angel. ”

And the room goes dark.

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In the darkness, the old note opens by itself, turns to an empty page, and words start to appear with no one around except the little angel.

“.....The Hermit walks toward the Fool, makes a bow, and sits on one of the wing chairs.”

“The symbol on that chair quickly changes to the symbol of Hermit.”

“The Fool and The Hermit start talking .”

“The Fool Says.....”

.....

End.