

## NORMAL FACES

By Sharkchild

My sister and I happened upon the variable of existence by chance. It might have been the way we walked in ghostly indifference under the setting sun's light, or perhaps it was the way we stared disjointedly across the endless horizon. Nevertheless, we arrived. Like a layer resting between all things, it rested in connection to all that was known, though it did not know it and nor did anything else in its contact. There were legends and cults in connection to such things, but they did not convey or understand the complexities of their childish assumptions. Full worlds were transparently placed upon one another, existing separately, yet silently interacting. One of those worlds was our own, and the other, the one we horribly wandered upon, was an incomprehensible place I called the variable of existence—the world where everything was the same except the beastly beings that inhabited it and sinisterly endowed upon our world a spiritual, yet unholy attribution of grace. Maybe the variable of existence was meant to be there as part of an unfathomable balance, or a rudder for a wayward vessel, but once I laid my eyes upon it, it was to me but a mysterious infection, incurable and eternal.

A handful of thousands of monsters dressed in frenzy waited upon me beneath the vast auburn tent pitched at the variable of existence. Their sizes differed and so did their hearts. They cried my name and sang my life. I was different to them and they repulsed that gratefully. Amidst them were young and old, child, mother, and great father. All of them were anxious to hear my voice.

I hung from two cables attached to a harness strapped across my chest. Under this harness, I wore a gray trench coat atop a suit and tie. I was positioned high within the tent, far from any of the monsters' reach—a reach that would have joyously torn me from breath in uncontrollable excitement and curiosity. Above me, and around me, a prowling cloud of dark, unearthly musk masked the top and distant ends of the tent. However, from where I hung, I could easily see, and shutter at the sight of, the entity that was the mass of onlookers. I tried to steady my pulse and catch my breath, but I eventually had to make do with the little confidence I could afford.

"It seems everyone already knows my name," I unsteadily yelled into the fields of animated filth as the beginning of my introduction. The masses quieted. Each monster gentled its face and prolonged its eyes. "I don't know your ways or your culture," I continued, "but I hope you can accept me as a simple being here and now who will aid you in your quest for knowledge regarding the peculiar union our two worlds hold. I have had only some brief time to explore your land, so I will not understand many of the variances."

As I spoke, I gazed out upon the crowds and witnessed the stupor across their faces. It was the first they had ever seen someone like me. I could tell they wanted nothing less than to touch and feel me—my clothes, my skin, my hair, my insides.

"My world is similar to this," I spoke on. "There is sky, soil, plant, water, and flame. Unlike your world, however, there are millions of species of creatures that inhabit and dwell within mine. In yours, there is but you, living in what

seems to be a place that gains its essence from my own world, like a three-dimensional shadow cast in complete replication. We cannot see you in our world and you cannot see us from yours. Yet, as you stand, we stand, and as you fill space, so do we. This is where the relationship between us is created.

“You look much different than the descriptions in ancient texts addressing you,” I spoke on, “but you are most definitely what we call angels. You unknowingly aid us in our need and give us spirit to live in and live by. We cannot see you, but we sense that you are around. And now I know it is not your own wills that you perform, at least not for us. The benefits you give us are but side effects of your casual life that dazzle our beliefs. And here I am, dazzling yours!”

At that, some of the monsters jumped up towards me with strange attraction, longing to rip me down from where I hung. Their screams and yells once again returned, but in a different tone and meaning. I cringed internally, but held my composure.

“I’m not exactly sure of what more I am supposed to say,” I announced, “but to say the very least: there is much to learn of each other, and I am willing to make that commitment.”

There were intelligent beings other than the monsters that inhabited the variable of existence. It was they that orchestrated my introduction to the world and the gathering at which I spoke. Each of these beings had a normal face, one I would have easily recognized in the rosy apparition of dusk. They had blue, brown, and even black eyes. They had eyebrows thick and thin. They had lips, ears, and hair that curled, fell straight, and fizzed upward. Their bodies, however, were the same as the numerous congregators of the bizarre world, malformed and sharply rough; it was just their faces that separated them, as if they were a hybrid of two worlds and the bastard children of a conspiring magic.

When my sister and I arrived, before we were ever exposed to the citizens of the variable of existence, the monsters, the normal faces were there to meet us. They were genuine and considerate. They spoke our language and talked to us of many things. They treated us well and met our needs. They taught us about the monsters and their dangerous ways.

Once I had stopped talking in the heights of the auburn tent, things swiftly grew restless. I wanted to be pulled up and the monsters wanted to pull me down. It was during this time that I almost sensed what they desired. There was something intangible within me that they did not have and that they so desperately wanted once they knew of it. This prize was a beacon to them and it needed to be attained, no matter what the cost.

Not a few lengths from me, someone strapped to similar cables was lowered down from the darkness to my side. It took me a second, but I quickly recognized those garments clinging to the body. It was my sister, but her face was not her own. She, unlike the normal faces, retained her body, but had been given the face of one of the monsters! I screamed imperviously. My stomach churned with the force of a hurricane and saliva and mucus instantly spewed from my lips.

“It is my turn now to speak,” She told me. The monsters below us launched into an uproar of shouting and cheering. “We will be ambassadors of

this world to our own,” she said. “Everything will make sense when they make you the same as me.”

“It isn’t right,” I whispered to myself. “This isn’t right!”

In shock and mourning, I began swinging my legs, gaining momentum so that I could gain the ability to travel horizontal distances. When the momentum necessary had been achieved, I lunged upon my sister, wrapping my legs around her while turning my eyes from her awful face. Her strength was impeccable, but I was faster. I unlatched her harness and sent her sprawling downward into the writhing accumulation of anticipating arms.

When my sister reached the scavenging, fighting grasps, claws and mouths dug deeply into her flesh, examining her every ounce. I turned away as her screams were abruptly ended.

I waited a moment, and then released my own harness.

Our departures rippled through the layers of worlds.