

THE COMING OF THE UNEXPECTED

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There were always so many people on the beaches those days of the summer's heat. They came with umbrellas and coolers and inhabited small squares of sand for the duration of several hours. Together, their grids of spaces collaborated into a small metropolis of unacquainted population. I walked those beaches, but I never took part in the mass accumulation. I would put on shorts and a loose-fitting shirt that blew in the wind and set out upon the coast, letting the tide wash in and out atop my steps. I would watch the sand-bedded congregations as they slept, flew kites, and swam in the water. These days were my favorite of the year.

Occasionally, on those walks, I would come across lost things: a fin, a board, a pail, a shovel, or some other trinket of sand- and water-design. One day, at the setting of the sun, when most had packed up their things and left, I came across something far greater in craft. It was not so visible, but visible enough. Part of it stuck securely out of the sand during the bottom of a low tide. Though the waves still ran over it, it showed itself often. Normally, I would not bother with such things, as I never kept anything I had found. This time, however, I was compelled to behold the object abandoned in the shores.

The object was much heavier than I anticipated when I lifted it. It was here that I first noticed about the thing a portrayal of deception. Then I gazed upon its color that shown red at one angle, yellow at another, and still a myriad of other colors at all other angles—this was the second acknowledgment I made of the exuding trickery. Lastly, I took in the form of the object, which spoke even louder of its eluding nature. In art and material, it was a statuette made of stone. In function, it was an image of a fat demon hording a bucket of water full of people. One person was in the demon's hand while the others were drowning within the water. The demon's stomach shown and on it was etched a symbol of stars and earth—a rock crowned with ten five-pointed stars.

I stared at the statuette for a long time—I stared at the demon's face that emanated a lustful joy; I stared at its body that looked strong despite its overweight disposition; and I stared at its horns that cringed into curves at their tips. It was truly a diabolical piece of craftsmanship, but I did not want to put it down, or throw it back from where it came.

The sun then vanished beneath the horizon, and as it did, the statuette immediately voided itself of all color. It became a sickly black, eluding even the details upon its surfaces. Within my hands, the object formed into shadow. With nothing more than a first glance, it looked like a chunk of charred wood, or a large rock—nothing at all like it had been only moments earlier. I almost dropped it at that instant for it lost much of its appeal, but after the initial shock of its transformation, I held on to it as tight as ever.

I took the statuette home and placed it on my entryway mantle in awaits of glancing upon it at the turning of the new day. It was hard to tear my eyes away from it as I saw in it a wound in matter that revealed another side of reality—a side of reality that reflected a pit of absolute nothingness. Staring into this pit made me feel empty and cold, but, nevertheless, I could not turn away. Finally, after sincere intention, I pried myself from the demon and spent

the rest of the evening watching a couple of movies that should have been locked and buried beneath the core of the earth.

When I went to sleep, things began to get exceedingly strange. Not five minutes after entering my bed did I begin to hear footsteps in my mind. They were not steps that could be assigned distance or proximity; rather, they were virtual—as if something was entering my mind on two feet. Their intensity grew through the plane of their travel and I did not look forward to meeting the thing that would enter the realm of my imagination.

I turned on the lights and left the bedroom, but that did not change the situation; the steps grew closer. I then began to head for the statuette, for it had to be the cause of the impending stranger.

When I arrived at the statuette, it was already too late. Just as I set my eyes upon the little, fat demon, a contorting shadow of a figure pranced into the vision of my mind. Once it arrived, it took a seat on the shifting ground of my thoughts in a cross-legged position. Black lined every curvature of its body and face.

“It seems we have a finder and keeper,” the dark figure whispered into my head. “Not many are fond of Diaboth, but you, you saw the beauty in its price.”

It felt wrong to be sent thoughts in a conscious state that were not of my ownership. Control over my body weakened and grew futile. With that relinquish, I became unstable and slid to the ground, leaning myself against a nearby wall.

I wanted to reply to the thing; I wanted to ask it what it meant. And, as if it knew what I wanted to ask, it replied.

“The price is life and the change is death. If you call Diaboth forth, the price will be paid.”

“Who is Diaboth?” I thought in my mind, but I already knew the answer to that question. Though I could not see the mind-violating entity’s face, I could sense its smile curving beneath its dark apparatus.

“Heat the idol,” the dark figure told me. “Heat the idol and Diaboth will come from the sea before the setting of tomorrow’s sun. Put it in fire and let it call upon the earth. Put it in fire and your price will be paid.”

After those words, the entity was gone except for its silhouette stained within my memory.

Without thought, I created a fire. Using wood and old newspaper, I began the frenzied flames that licked the presence of my fireplace. I gave it more fuel than was necessary and its heat leapt forward, reaching beyond the bounds of its near proximity. When the embers began to form, I knew it was ready. I took the statuette and threw it into the fire. It landed heavily and splashed bright ashes into the open like confetti.

I let the statuette sit in the flames while tending to the fire’s needs. The stone idol began to glow as it gathered the heat. When the fire would begin to wane, I would put another piece of wood into the fury. On one of those deliveries, a lone ash landed atop my arm and alarmed me with its touch. When I felt the pain, I regained a sense of intelligence I had somehow lost after interacting with the dark figure.

At once, reason flooded my mind and the things I had done became an absurdity. I was instantly repulsed by my actions and the demon, and began to

poke and douse the fire. It was quickly put out and, afterwards, I sat down to collect myself. While skimming over my thoughts and those strange bouts of uncontrollable direction, I heard a sudden crack within the fireplace.

I investigated the source and came upon a large ridge that had formed upon the statuette—obviously caused by its sudden change in temperature. Looking at the flawed demon renewed the recent hate I had acquired towards it and the strange obedience I had had to the dark figure. I took the demon outside, laid it upon the ground, took a sledgehammer I had in the garage, and smashed upon the stone thing. It crumbled into pieces after no more than three blows. I would have left it there and been done with it, but I noticed something peculiar about the shapes of the pieces that were remaining. Each piece was an exact replication of the original statuette on a smaller scale. It was cosmically impossible. This enraged me. I took my sledgehammer and pounded further upon the already broken demon idol; I pounded until the pieces were so small that I could not tell what design they had. It was only then that I felt content enough to go bed, but even in bed, I was not satisfied.

When morning came, I remained in bed. I pondered what I had done and I pondered whether or not the visiting dark figure was real. To justify myself, I dragged myself to a cliff overlooking the beach where I found the demon idol. I perched myself there and planned to stay there until the sun had set and the nonsense of the dark figure had passed. I waited for many hours.

When it came out of the water, I did not think it was real. It was too large and too surreal. But, the head of Diaboth was clear and visible a half a mile from the shore, and it only grew taller as it walked up on the ascending seabed of the coast. The people on the sand noticed it almost immediately and rushed deeper inland without hesitation. I looked on from the distant cliff with binoculars, in awe and terror. Hordes of panic-stricken souls flocked like sheep away from the danger, wounding and leaving many to lay in shock upon the sands. Several people were still swimming in the water and were flailing themselves forward in hopes of reaching the shore in time.

Once Diaboth's huge, stone-built bucket cleared the surface of the ocean, it poured about a sixth of the contents back into the sea, leaving a wall of inescapable heights. At this time, the sounds the demon was making became quite audible. The most noticeable was the wicked tune that it hummed, stinging the ears with a horrible melody.

Before long, Diaboth was walking out of the ocean and into a human infested habitat. It collected the stragglers and the unfortunate. It took the slow and the unable. And all of them were thrown into the bucket of water. Whether a swimmer or not, only a grim future awaited those who entered. The beast did not travel very far inward, and seemed to be content with the twenty odd captives it had taken. It began to head back to the ocean without much of a delay or grand embarkation of destruction.

Diaboth was halfway back into the ocean when the dark figure reappeared within my mind. It did not say anything to me or move. It stood motionless, waiting diabolically for something to occur. Instead of focusing on the horizon that shown through the binoculars, the image of the dark figure plagued my mind, stealing away my sight from the world of the physical. It did not matter at all where I turned my head or moved my eyes, the image would

have been the same. After several minutes of dominating my attention, the dark figure in my mind left.

I let the binoculars fall around my neck and I let my arms fall to my sides. As I did so, I noticed something large standing where the plummet of the cliff was—a place where only birds should have flown. I let my eyes turn and glance upon that which was there and I literally died the moment I saw what was before me. It was Diaboth, but it was not Diaboth; it was a different demon of the same breed. With a treacherous hand, it grabbed me and pulled me into the air. For a moment, I saw further up the coast and witnessed the detriment of numerous other gargantuan demons coming forth from the ocean to collect their pittance of humans as well, but the vision quickly ended. Like Diaboth, this demon also had a bucket, and that was where it dropped me, leaving me to the bowls of churning death.

Several others were placed into the bucket after me. Many quickly drowned, but some swam with all of their might to stay afloat amidst the turmoil of thrashing waters. I, myself, had managed a hold upon a miraculous notch of stone on a side of the bucket. I held onto it fiercely and postponed my demise. As with Diaboth, when this demon had gathered a couple dozen people, it began its return to the ocean. By the time the demon was waist deep in the water, I was the only soul left breathing.

Lower and lower the demon got as it walked further towards the horizon, and as the demon walked, the sun made its last entertainments of the earth. Soon thereafter, the bucket had submersed. I attempted to flee the cradle of stone, but I was without luck or strength. The water caved around me and down the bucket went below the surface. I did not even float then as I expected; instead, I fell with gravity as if I had never gone under the water. It was at this point that I could see more and breathe no more. I almost immediately gave into my instincts to inhale and the water poured into my lungs, sending me thoroughly into the oblivion of blackness.

I last remember the contorting figure entering the visions of my deceasing. It graced its way into view and then seemed to touch me physically and incomprehensibly within. It came as close to my essence as it could and then spoke to me. “Nothing but stone,” it said. “Nothing but earth.” And then I became rigid.