

The Face No. 9

“To Rise Again”

There are times when one can feel totally at ease within oneself, enveloped in the experience of quieting sedation that soothes a body's wounds, and the feeling of comfortableness as if in a deep relaxing state of sleep. However... when the time comes nigh, a gush of wind can bring back memories of the recent past and a feeling of regret and remorse upon the victim's part... something in which he wish he hadn't done, and finally, this one returns to the profound realization of the reality that had befallen him. The reality of... **pain...**

Agony had seemingly ripped through my very bones as I lay awake, wide-eyed and staring at the dark ceiling above me. Where was I? What had happened? The real question was... who was I? Nothing in my mind led to past remembrances of my life. I had forgotten all... well, most of it. The only thing that I could remember was myself being pummeled by a vicious, violent young woman who had some sort of agenda against me. Why she attacked me, I did not remember. The only thing I remembered was being beaten, battered, and thrown into what seemed to be a watery grave. Yet here, as chance would have it, I was still alive. Was this for some sort of purpose? I did not know the answer to that question either.

“Settle down, settle down,” A voice spoke, though I knew not from whom it came from. “Let me administer the morphine to you. It looks as if it has worn off a bit.”

I tried to look around, but I could hardly move. Though I knew I wasn't in a hospital. I looked to be in some sort of house.

“Careful, you're severely injured. If that woman hadn't brought you to me, you would have been sunken to the bottom of that river.”

“Woman?” I wondered in my head.

He flashed a light into my eye. “Now tell me, are you able to speak?”

I tried to say something. The words wouldn't come, and my lips wouldn't move.

“Not much of a talker, are you? Ah well, I suppose I should do the talking then. I'm Doctor Kerall. A home physician if you will. I would think that your rescuer sent you here because she did not want to expose your identity to the local hospital. Although I do not recognize you myself.”

He walked over to a table in the room. “Ah yes, she also brought some of your things.” He picked up a thin rubbery layer of make shift skin. “Or... what's left of it. This is the only thing you had left that was not in tatters. A mask I believe. Do you recognize it? Ah, yes, you're unable to speak. Well, I do have your jacket, but it is torn to tatters, and about as damp as a soaked sponge.”

“Wh...who... brought me here?” I struggled to ask.

“Ah, so you *are* able to speak. Very good then. She seemed to go by the name... Lady Cancra. Do you know her?”

I tried to remember the name. I couldn't.

“No. I don't,” I replied.

“Hmm... predicament, I suppose. Now let's see... do you by any chance remember anything at all?”

I could remember nothing except for the incident that landed me here in the first place.

“No,” I said.

“Predicament, indeed. Let us hope this memory loss is temporary. Excuse me while I check on my supplies,” he said, walking out the doorway.

I lay in the bed, feeling little pain, in a far-from-sober state. I put my head down to rest in sleep once more, but far too quickly, a sound startled me. My eyes opened slowly, and I looked toward the window that was across from me. It was opened, and there was a strange, blurry figure standing in front of the breezing opening. His eyes were narrow and he wore a dark blue outfit.

“Look at you... Look at what's happened to you.”

I blinked my eyes many times to confirm that this sight was not a hallucination or some sort of dream. Soon the view of the figure began to focus.

“What... who... are you?”

He stepped closer.

“Don't remember, do you? Figures.”

I still didn't understand.

“Even so, I still feel obliged to tell you this. You shouldn't have been out there. You and your journalistic investigative ways... you don't know what kind of trouble you're getting into. Precariously pouncing around like some sort of naïve jackrabbit begging to be hunted by a coyote.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“What I'm saying is... maybe this wasn't your fault, but what's happened has happened. But if you were more prepared for this event, maybe you wouldn't have turned out this way. What I'm saying is that you *need to be prepared*.”

“Alright then... I'll be prepared... for whatever comes up...” I played along.

“You don't get it. Your mind isn't right. We'll have to make it right. We'll have to repair all the damage. But I'm not the one to do it. I know someone. The doctor will understand. He would want you to go to him. He would support it.”

“Go to who? I still don't understand.”

“You will... in time. The doctor will be informed.”

I rested my head on my pillow once again to stare at the ceiling.

“You know, I don't think I'm really up to travel right now... maybe sometime tomorrow...”

But when I looked toward the window... the dark figure had vanished.

After a week of recuperation, I was finally able to be released from the doctor's home. However, the pain was just beginning. The pain to have to go through to walk again was far from over.

“Thank you for the meds, doctor. Really appreciated.”

The doctor nodded and sent me out the door into the world of light once again.

“Now I have arranged for you to be picked up by cab to take you to your next location. There you shall receive your help.”

I was skeptical about leaving the doctor's house. After all, I had nowhere else to go. But I didn't want to continue taking refuge in someone else's home. I had to venture out into the sunlight again in order to reclaim past memories.

Soon the cab arrived by the house, and I picked up the bag full of supplies in which the doctor had left for me as well as a crutch in my right hand and entered the vehicle.

"Good morning, sir," the cabbie greeted. "We'll have you at your destination in no time."

"May I ask where this cab will be taking me good sir?" I asked.

The cabbie looked skeptical, but replied. "Uh, yeah, sure. It's 1 Mountain View Drive."

"Alright..." I said unsurely. The name was not recognizable to me.

It was a very long drive, and I had drifted off to sleep during the ride. In total, the ride must have taken two hours. But when I awoke, my vision caught sight of a beautiful prairie meadow filled with bustling plant life and nature abundant. The sky was clear blue, with white-tailed clouds puffing through the sky, and the sun shone brightly with rays shining upon the green grass as far as the eye could see. The windows were rolled down to reveal a perfect breeze that whistled throughout the cab and brushed against my face. It was tranquil, despite the many discomforts I felt.

Soon we came to a stop for some reason, in the middle of the dirt road we rode upon. In front of the parked cab was a grandly large mountain with a long, winding dirt path leading all the way to the top. The grass upon the mountain was just as green as the prairie's, and the sun here shone just as bright.

"Here we are," the cabbie said.

The tranquility within me transformed into frightful anxiety.

"What?! You can't be serious!"

"This is where I was told to take you. No doubt about it. So either take it or leave it, or I'm gonna charge you for staying in my car too long."

"Can't we discuss this?!" I pleaded.

"Got any cash?" he asked.

I shook my head in utter disbelief.

"Then no deal."

He reached into the back seat, and took my briefcase to throw it upon the grass near the foot of the mountain.

"I didn't know you were gonna drop me off at a mountain!" I cried.

"1 Mountain View Drive. How blatantly obvious could it get?" he argued. "Now get out, and hit the road. I gotta make it to grandma's cookout."

Reluctantly, I got out of the car. I then angrily shook my left fist at the cabbie for bringing me toward such a fate. I struggled to find a seat at the foot of the hilly mountain to contemplate my situation.

I sighed. It was rather peaceful down here. Maybe I could stay awhile. But what about food? I was in a rut. There was nowhere I could go... except up.

So I hobbled down to the beginning of the winding dirt path to proceed up the mountain... and face the most devastating climb I ever had to face.

Twenty minutes past, and at the rate I was going, hobbling on my crutch as I was, I wasn't even halfway to the top yet. I trudged along through what seemed many painful hours until I reached a small shady oasis, where I could be protected from the sun. It had seemed to be getting hotter now, and I was dampened due to all the perspiration I had been leaking from the excruciating climb.

"Man I should've brought water..." I said.

I looked in relief as the dirt path ended, and I finally reached the top of the mountain that I had so longed to be over with. My legs ached, and my injured one even more so, and my muscles were tired and ready to collapse. I almost felt like a dishrag.

However, as I looked up expecting to see the blue sky above me, I saw exactly what I feared I would see, but I could not acknowledge the sight.

"Hey what's that cliff doing in the way?" I wondered to myself, looking upward toward a gigantic clump of dirt and rock that impeded my journey.

I collapsed to the ground in fainting.

A few hours passed, and virtually all the muscles in my body were undeniably sore. Still... I had much to do. It was night by now, the moon had risen high in the sky, and the temperature seemed to have dropped to frigid numbers. Winds blew furiously as I cringed in a shivering freeze. My teeth chattered momentarily as my muscles begin to contract rapidly in order to maintain heat.

It was much too cold for me to sleep. I sat down and decided to wait for the sun to rise.

However, bad luck and unfortunate chance occurred when I heard the distinct howling of wolves in the distance. And soon thereafter... I began to hear the howling winds transfer into my ears, and also the ruffling of footsteps upon grass.

If I wasn't frozen then, I froze even more at the fright and caution I experienced as the hairs on my back began to straighten in a rigid formation. I picked myself back up with the help of my crutch and looked toward the top of the cliff.

"It's not that far..." I began to tell myself.

I heard another howl... a silent whisper... and footsteps.

My heart began to race. Adrenaline began to muster. I quickly grabbed my suitcase and hurled it to the top of the cliff. In rapid motion, I did the same with my crutch hurriedly trying to escape before the bloodhounds found me. I limped to the wall of the cold, grassy cliff, and began to climb, feeling gut-wrenching pain with each push. Completely absorbed in thought that I had to escape the wolves, I climbed as fast as I could, as if they were one step behind me. I ignored the pain, and I continued with nervous shock running in my veins, until some time later, I reached the top.

I collapsed onto the ground, now remembering the pain that I had left behind, which had caught up to me by then. I fell unconscious once more.

The next morning was not as bright and early as the one preceding it. The clouds had covered the blue-clear sky like a gray sheet over that of a brightly colored bed. Thunder roared through the skies, but lightning had yet to be shed upon the ground. The green mountain had turned into a gloomy, less lively color of mold-green, and the bright dirt path had darkened to a shade of grainy brown substance. The entire atmosphere was filled with gloom, which made me somehow sick to the stomach, and the pain in my body ache ever more.

But still I trudged on... upon that one dirt path, until I reached the top of that mountain; the mountain that had challenged me from the beginning. And the journey still had not yet come to a close.

The storm was raging by now, thunder and lightning clattered against the darkened meadow around me. But I had finally reached the top. A small wooden cottage lay at the end of the dirt road, and the path that I had taken seemed to be the longest driveway I had ever seen in my entire life.

A strange figure sat in a chair in front of the doorway... as if he was expecting me to be there at that very moment...

He was quite old from the looks of it. His hair seemed oddly toxic green in the dark skies, with some strands of whiteness. He was dressed in a slightly dirty, dampened, white robe with some sort of symbol on the front... Chinese I suppose. His feet were bare, and I noticed something else about him that I did not recognize before. He was sitting in a wheelchair.

"I expected you to overcome the hill before the storm arrived..." he expected of me.

I looked at him in puzzlement and disillusionment.

"In *my* condition!?" I asked forthrightly.

"It doesn't matter your condition. It matters of your will. Now, will you or will you not accept my challenge?"

"What challenge?" I asked. "It was challenging enough to get up that mountain you call a hill over there!" I roared, pointing to the dirt path behind me.

"My friend, this is only the beginning of the long, arduous road ahead of you."

"The road ahead? What are you talking about? There are no more roads for me to take! If you're forcing me to go, then I'll go!" I said, though unsure of where to go.

"And where will you go? Back down there? You're not ready for that yet. I don't know why you were sent to me. You complain too much. First Lady Cancra saves you, though I do not know why, and speaks good word of you. I believe she sees some sort of 'fighting spirit' in you. But you don't look the type. Then the Blue Panther asks me to help you in your journey. Though I am reluctant, I cannot back down from two requests."

"I don't know any of those people," I said.

"Yes, you are a pitiful case. Your mind has been warped. I was afraid of this."

"So I don't remember who I am. It'll come back. I know it. Who are you anyway?"

"Well, if you must know, my name is Kimo. And I will be responsible for shaping you back to health and undoing the damages that Lady Cancra has done to you. But you must realize, that this road will not be easy. You will undergo intensive physical strains that will test the very limits of your strength. You will not be able to return home for many months... maybe even years. There is no going back now. You will not survive if you go back out there like this. The only thing for you to do... is be trained."

I pondered at what this old man was telling me. I did not believe I was actually considering this.

"You mean... I'm not going to be able to ever see my home again until I've been here for a year... and I'm going to receive training from... a cripple?"

He swiped his hand, releasing the crutch that I leaned upon from my grasp. I fell to the ground.

“I am not the cripple here,” he said. He took an axe. “Get up,” he commanded.

I hesitantly obeyed. He threw the axe at me. Shocked, I was utterly relieved when I successfully caught hold of the non-sharpened side.

“You had better get to work to be able to cook the food tonight...”

I couldn’t believe it.

“Chop wood? I’ve got a busted leg, an arm in bad shape, and I just climbed a seriously overextended mountain to a house that I don’t even know... and you want me to chop wood?”

He knocked the crutch out of my hand again with great speed, which caught me off guard once again. This time, the axe dropped too, and barely left its mark across my left cheek.

“Just checking...” I said, struggling to my feet.

Months passed, and by then, I had lost all sense of time. The training was rigorous, as Master Kimo said. He wouldn’t let me give up. In fact, he would *threaten* me if I ever attempted to. Life with Kimo was not a pretty sight. It was enough aggravation for a man to lose all his hairs. Each day was a new challenge, some being more difficult than the rest. At times when I felt I had to collapse onto the grass, Kimo kept pushing me to my limits. There was nowhere to go. I *had* to endure it. I *had* to keep fighting. If not, who knows what would become of me. There were few times when I was bustling with energy, like a barrowing ox plowing across the plains. But when the energy was gone, my bones ached, my muscles ached; in the early mornings, I was pushed to so far that even my stomach ached, and everything that came out of it.

There were times when we sparred... and not just hand to hand combat. It was more along the lines of me being attacked. He claimed to be teaching me many different ways of the martial arts. He never did tell me what I was learning. I didn’t even *think* I was learning anything... just *enduring*. When he used weapons... pointy, sharpened, weapons that pierced through objects, he would at times dig the points into my skin to teach me resistance. If that weren’t enough, some even contained small portions of different types of *venoms* and *toxins*. I never liked needles to say the least... but after the many times he gouged me with those pointed weapons... it was enough for me to overcome my fear. I had to have at least been stuck a thousand times. There was even a time when he had ripped horizontally across my abdomen. An organ had to be removed of infection, and it had to be re-stitched. It had turned out that the organ had already been suffering from my battle with Lady Cancra. At some points I would foolishly fall asleep during the day, which were hard-learned lessons all their own. For as I lay asleep, he would remove a hidden door to the roof, which let the burning sun high above in the sky scar and char my skin. Each day my energy was spent, and the nights were short-lived. I felt as if I could sleep all day at times. I was so tired that my whole body would just fall unconscious on its own leaving my mind awake and alone, or my mind would shut down in the middle of a sprint, and I would tumble down a large hill only to awaken with large scars and bruises all over myself. But that... was how life was back then. It was a recurring cycle that challenged the notion of ‘every-day life’ and molded it into ‘every-day suffering.’ Yes, that was my life. But there was one thing to look forward to through it all... the end.

The sun was bright again. It reminded me of the day when I first arrived before I had reached the mountain. The bright light from outer space was glistening out upon the mountaintop, and shedding its way across the many prairies below. The wind had returned; a spring wind. It brushed against my face as I breathed in an invigorating breath of fresh air.

“Now kick,” Kimo commanded.

Using my good leg, I kicked against the wind, whirling in motion until my feet came to a stop upon the ground. A fierce wind brushed by Kimo.

“Very good. Your form has improved. Now let us see your accuracy and speed.”

He had a pile of stones in his lap, as he sat upon his wheelchair.

With accurate precision, he launched each stone, one by one toward me.

Using my heightened reflexes, I was able to deflect each stone with various, rapid motions from my arms without defect. They waved about in rigid, but flowing movements so that even I was impressed by them.

“You have come very far from your impetuous, ill-mannered state in the beginning.”

“I’d like to think so,” I replied.

“I commend you, my friend, for enduring the hardships of the rigorous strains of Kimo. Now that you are ready, I have something to present to you.”

He went inside the small, brown cottage that I had seen far too many times now.

When he returned from the inside, he held a box in his lap. It was a white box, and the writing upon it was addressed to me. I had remembered my name.

“Take this... and go to your room. Gather your things. Your time here is finished.”

Surprised, I took the gift. “Thanks, Kimo. A present? For me? What is it?”

“That is not for me to say. I was ordered to return it to you after your training was finished.”

I took the white box into the house and lay it upon the small cot that I had struggled to gain rest on each night. I grabbed my suitcase and put it aside. Then I returned the box to reveal its contents.

Inside the box were memories of a distant past that came rushing back into my current future. Knowledge rose from the depths of the deep blue of my mind like the rising of a sunken ship that contained precious treasures from an ancient past. But there was something different about. Yes, the color. However, I took the piece of paper and read it fervently.

“Ah, at last you have endured your greatest test, and you have survived. I have taken the liberty of remodeling your old suit and giving you a distinctly new one. After all, that trench-coat did prove to be rather damp and tattered. But don’t worry, your face will still be the same.”

I looked inside and picked up the brand new, smooth white fedora that had been included with the gift and fitted it upon my head. Then I returned to the box to view its other contents: a brand new, white-suit jacket with stainless white pants, white gloves, and a bright red shirt with black tie to go underneath. And of course, I saw an old friend once again. I stared into the faceless mask that I hadn’t touched in months, and replied, “Face, it’s nice to see you again.”

But alas, underneath, there was another gift. It was a silver necklace, and upon it was a hanging cross. A small, attached post read, "For your protection and a renewal of your past."

More memories flooded my mind as I grasped the chain in hand.

I looked up to the open roof of my room and into the sky to say, "Thanks for giving me life again," and I walked out of the house and into my renewed life for the first time.

But there were still things I had to take care of. And one of them met me just outside the door.

"Blue Panther. Good to see you again," I said.

"I see you've gotten your memory back."

"All that, and more," I said, flinging fist forward.

"It's good to see your progress. It'll be a good test for your first mission back into the real world."

"A mission? Already? But I'm not ready!" I protested.

"Don't worry, you are. You've learned a lot even though you may not know it." He took out a transcript.

"Remember Rowlin Abbitt? He's the one who wanted you dead. Well, he's got another thing coming. I would've gone after him myself, but I thought you deserved to handle this one."

"Rowlin's still at it? What's his beef?"

"His *beef* is exactly this... power... control... riches... corruption. After gaining power through the mayor, he's been targeting other towns... and one of them is nearby; the place where he's known to be handling his operations right now. Things... have been said about him... unknown things."

"What kind of things?"

"*Dark* things..."

"But with your attire, you look like you can handle dark things..." he said, as he viewed my newly received white suit. "Your new outfit?"

"Yes, from a friend. I thought gray was a bit gloomy."

He handed the transcript to me.

"This is all you need to know about Rowlin Abbitt, and how to get to him. From here on out, you're all alone."

I viewed the transcript carefully. But one thing I never did find out in my time here was where exactly *here* was.

"Do you...?" I asked, shifting my head upward only to view that once again, he had vanished into thin air.

"I guess he really meant what he said."

And I headed down the dirt path that I had taken to arrive at the very place in which I had begun.