



## **THE BOOK**

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**Published:** 2010

**Categorie(s):**

**Tag(s):** "Short Story" Fluffy Weird

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Thank You...

Dedicated to Tracie N because she was sort of there when I had the idea...

Also thanks to David C for the after-proof reading.

Now let us begin...

# Chapter 1

An old woman walked up to the front door of the non-descript terraced house and rang the doorbell.

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Somewhere inside the non-descript terraced house...

Movement and then, slowly, consciousness arrived.

It was too early for the doorbell. Noises like that should be banned before, well, before whatever time it was in the morning that this particular doorbell was being rung at. He turned to look at the clock that was perched beside his bed like some evil harbinger of doom and realised it was afternoon. Early afternoon, so that was okay.

No it was not okay. The doorbell rang again and again. He would have said fuck, but there was no-one to admonish his expletive, so he didn't.

Another RING.

"FUCK". He decided to anyway and then he gave himself a slight telling off. It made him feel better, not only for the release of tension that the swear word gave, but also the maturity that he felt for the self scolding he had metered out.

He tried to ignore it but then it became a knocking on the door and when he had successfully ignored that it became a tapping on the window followed by a banging, then a thumping upon the window and then a shouting through the letter box. He did not recognise the voice but it knew him. It was shouting his name and, from the tone of the shouting, he knew this person was not going to go away until he either answered the door and enquired to the reason for this early disturbance or, and this was his preference, he answered the door and shot the person disturbing him.

He didn't have a gun so, after making his way through two doors and down more than two stairs, he did the former.

“What?”

The old woman was holding a book and looking at him with a certain amount of concern, surprise and amusement.

“What do you want?” he shouted. He was a man of few words and, at this moment in time, was a man of even fewer clothes.

“This is for you.” She said thrusting the book towards him. He instinctively took it and then, for some deeply ingrained and unknown reason, he tried to return it to this aged female standing on his doorstep and looking down at his groin.

“No my friend.” My friend? Oh shit, she was one of those, they were the worst. Knocking on your door and giving you a book and then wanting you to TALK to them. He wasn’t going to fall for that old trick, he was too wise, he was not going to get involved in a conversation. “It is your book now.”

“My book?” Okay, he was not that wise. “What do you mean, my book?”

She did not answer. She just walked away from his door and only stopped and turned to say two words. Two words that would send shivers through his body.

“Nice socks.”

He looked at the book in his hands. He felt it look back at him. It looked like the sort of tattered old book you would find at a car boot sale. The cover was damaged and the lettering on there was unreadable. The only letters he could make out were “Y??? L??E b? ??D” and, what looked like, a picture of a fluffy kitten holding a switchblade. It was a large book and seemed to have a lot, an awful lot, of pages.

He ran after the old woman who was, he was amazed to see, running rather faster than an old woman should. “Please stop, I need to give you this... .”

## Chapter 2

"Please stop, I need to give you this cock?"

Two hours later and, dressed only in a blanket and a pair of socks, he was sat in the police interview room feeling more confused than he had ever felt in his life. The police officer asking the questions was staring at him the way that he might look at an unmovable stain within his underpants.

"Sorry, you've lost me."

"Sir. You were seen by myself and my colleague here" the police officer glanced at the second, female, officer who was also partaking in the interview "running naked." At this moment the second officer interrupted to say "apart from socks"

"Apart from a pair of socks and shouting "Please stop, I need to give you this cock" at the old woman you appeared to be chasing."

He was feeling quite aggrieved to be sat here, wrapped in the sort of blanket that would make a hairshirt feel smooth, when he should be at home watching the afternoon edition of some pointless television show. And so he decided to engage his brain in an attempt to speed up his expected release.

"What the fuck are you two shits on about?" Unfortunately his mouth kicked in before his brain. The two officers simply looked at him, they were used to the abuse, but it hadn't helped his cause.

They sat in silence for what seemed seconds before the female responded "Must have been very cold chasing that woman down the street?" It was said with a smirk but also with enough knowledge to make him feel, well, small.

"Sorry" was his measured response "but I am sure, positive, that was not what I said. I'm sure I said book."

The male officer gave a nod and then produced the book from out of an evidence bag that seemed to have appeared from nowhere (not a spelling mistake). "You mean this book?" The prisoner nodded in the affirmative direction and then, because he had seen the cop shows on

television, instinctively said “yes” before the inevitable “for the tape, sir.”

The officer held the book in his hands and turned it over one hundred and eighty degrees and then back again. “This fake book?” He went through the motions of trying to open it but there were no pages to turn to, just solid a solid side with pretend pages neatly drawn on it. He handed it over and John, for that is our blanket covered friends name, took it and looked at it thoughtfully. He looked at the cover and saw a fluffy cat winking at him, which was quite clever for a one-eyed cat.

“Yes, this book” he said opening it, randomly, to a page about a quarter of the way in. The male officer grabbed the book which slammed shut as soon as John released his grip on it and attempted to open it, but to no avail. The pages that had been, neatly, drawn on the side seemed to be smiling and the fluffy one-eyed kitten seemed to be smirking back at the officer.

The two young officers were now heading towards a big hole of hopelessness and it didn’t take long for them, two people who could not open a book, to admit that maybe they had misheard the word “book” and the whole incident was a misunderstanding. And besides the old woman had not only not made a complaint but, it turned out, had not even been located.

# Chapter 3

Half an hour later, with no charges pressed and with a borrowed red jogging suit (lost property) covering his nakedness, John walked out of the police station and into the late afternoon sunshine. It was a hot summer's day which, all of a sudden, made him feel small.

"Sorry about that, but really?" The old woman was sat on the wall outside of the police station, apparently, waiting for him "chasing a vulnerable old lady down the street dressed only in socks?"

John walked on trying to dismiss the existence of this elderly female that was now walking along side him.

"You want me to say sorry?" Answering her was probably not the best way to ignore someone that, he knew deep inside, he did not want to ignore. He stopped to look, for the first time properly, at the old woman who had helped to waste half of his day. There was no denying she was an old woman, the wrinkles, grey hair and old womanness were there for all to see. But there was something else, the deeper he looked, the more he felt uncomfortable at what he saw. At first the truth evaded John but then it hit him with such disgust that his soul, his inner self, his logic, his brain and his heart removed all knowledge of the truth that was now lost, maybe forever.

The old woman looked into John's eyes as they stood, staring at each other, on the pavement. "It is, at least it could be, true."

"What could be true?" He knew it, deep inside, but he was not telling himself.

"That which you are trying to conceal. The ending of the book." The book. The book that was in his hand and, he was starting to feel uncomfortable about this, seemed to be becoming a part of him.

"John, you cannot keep thinking of me as the old woman." He thought to himself that, if he wanted to, he could, but he knew it would be easier to think of her as a named person.

"So, old woman, what should I call you?"

She looked at him as if she could not work out if it was a serious question or he was just playing hard to get. She soon realised that he really did not know her name and so, with good reason, she decided to lie. "My name is" or did she lie? "Catherine" she said.

# Chapter 4

## Not Really A Chapter

Sometimes, within the narrative of stories such as this, tenses, genders, names, times and places and so on and so forth can become confused. There are, possibly, two reasons for this. The first is that, due to the complicated nature of such tales the events can cause slight twists within space and time that surround the events that are being portrayed. This can lead to confusion to the reader that is, unfortunately necessary in some cases, to allow the structure of the story to traverse its way to a satisfying conclusion. The confusion is all part of the reading experience and without this the overall enjoyment would not be as great as it could be.

The second reason is that the author is a lazy, un-educated, person who cannot be bothered to proof read his own work.

You decide.

# Chapter 5

So the two of them sat cross legged on the pavement unnoticed, it seemed, by the passers by. For a short while there were no words, only attempted mind games which, unsurprisingly, if he was able to accept the truth, John was losing twelve nil.

Finally Catherine spoke and, although what she said was completely unexpected, John completely expected it, he just didn't know that he expected it. "So do you often sit on the pavement talking to ghosts?"

A flicker of emotion outside, a flicker of emotion inside.

"He is denying your true identity" John did not answer.

"They usually do that" she replied "at first" and then, almost as an afterthought she added "or so I have been told."

"He might not have long left" John did not respond.

"But then where does that leave me?" Catherine seemed concerned. Did her existence depend on whether John read the book or not? If he did not then would she live? And if he does...

"You have brought this upon yourself. You should not have been so careless in the first place."

"But because of my carelessness this needs to happen."

"And if it does not work, if he does not read the book?" The words John had not just said silenced Catherine for a while and she sat there contemplating and talking to herself.

"Then where does that leave me?" She repeated only slightly louder.

"Perpetual purgatory I believe." The voice laughed with such venom that it was as if a million snake bites were running through her veins. Although, as nothing had been running through her veins for decades, that might have been preferential.

"And if he reads the book and it does not end as you wished?"

She looked back at the nothingness that was talking to her from a fraction in front of where John was sat and, as gently and succinctly as an old lady possibly could replied "Then I guess I'll be well and truly fucked."

## Chapter 6

“Ghosts?” John said as if a thousand volts had just found their way into his body. “I don’t believe in ghosts. They do not exist.” It had been one of those days that ensured that the last sentence had a slight questioning lilt about it.

“Maybe you should read the book.” She pointed at the tome in his hands and he instinctively looked at the kitten on the cover. It looked sinister, nothing to do with the missing eye and the switchblade clasped in its paw, but beyond that was something hidden. Deep inside.

He nodded negatively and tried to give the book back to Catherine but it seemed to be stuck in his hand. No, that wasn’t it; it seemed to have become a part of his hand. His right hand now consisted of a palm, one thumb, four fingers and a book. His immediate thought was that this could make certain pastimes of his slightly difficult to say the least.

“But you must read it.” She looked pleadingly into his tired looking eyes and tried to give a granny like loving look.

“You okay?” he responded before adding, “why should I read it.”

“Because it is your life contained within, your past, your present and your future.” That came as quiet a revelation to John and, once again, he unsuccessfully tried to let go of the book. It felt like it was frozen into his skin, not painful, but threatening to become so.

“I refuse to read it. Why don’t YOU read it if you are so interested in me?” God he was dumb she thought to herself. Does he not realise anything about the books of the “could be unborn if the born do not become dead and allow the unborn to infiltrate there still fresh cadaver”? She realised the “Dark Ones” really needed to come up with a snappier title for all of this. She also thought to herself that the “Dark Ones” really were something that breached the trade descriptions act. They were not dark in the slightest. How can anyone describe them self as dark when they are called Muriel, Kevin or Beelzebub? Okay, possibly Kevin could, but Muriel and Bebub (as she was known to the members of the knitting circle)?

"You have to read it yourself." Catherine said and then, as if to reiterate the obvious "because it is your life and only you can understand it."

John thought for a while. He already knew his past, so if he read that it would be boring, even certain "happy" parts he had already memorised for when he needed to withdraw into his "special place". The present, well, no point in reading what was actually happening and as for his future, that scared him.

"I will not read it" he said with such firmness that he surprised himself. Then a thought hit him like, well, being hit by something non-physical. "What would reading about the present achieve but... " It was forming in his mind and so he spoke slowly at first and then, with the confidence coursing through him, sped up "John read the book. It says that I am reading the book, he thought to himself. John thought to himself that he was thinking to himself that he was reading the book. He thought to himself about thinking to himself and thought to himself that if he keeps thinking about what he is doing it would become like an infinite loop of thinking about reading the book, he thought to himself, he thought. John then thought about how he could stop thinking about thinking to himself but his thoughts were getting confused by tenses and grammar and his brain was starting to fry with all the multiple thoughts multiplying themselves, he thought to himself... AND SO ON AND SO ON AND SON ON" he ended, shouting at Catherine.

She looked crestfallen. She wasn't crestfallen; it was just that confusion had a similar facial emotion.

"Well?"

"It's an interesting thought." This wasn't how she was expecting things to pan out. Surely a human would want to know their future? She never assumed otherwise. "So you are not even the slightest bit tempted to see what your future holds?"

"Of course I am" John answered immediately and then he looked at Catherine and, again for a fraction of a fraction of a second, had a sense of recollection.

"Then why don't we go back to your flat and you can read it?"

"No, it is not happening."

"Why the hell not?" Catherine was now exasperated to say the least.

"Because I can't read" was the, probably by now, obvious answer.

To the outsider and the uninitiated, the punch that she delivered to the left side of Johns head seemed, at least, a bit extreme. But to the insider and the initiated the punch that she delivered to the left side of Johns head would have been recognisable and, therefore, necessary. It was a specialist punch, delivered with clinical precision that had been passed down by the "Dark Ones". It was designed to instil the knowledge of reading into the brain of the punched one in one simple blow. This may seem extreme but, and I'm sure you will agree, is a lot preferable to hours of tedium caused by the repetitive reading of patronising books about Peter and Jane and their perfect, but with hints at a dark underlying shadow, upbringing.

John came to his senses, almost, and so Catherine pulled out a piece of paper and wrote, with the pen that also appeared, a few easy words for John to read. There was no recognition in his eyes.

She thought for a few moments and then realised her mistake "Shit, I always get my left and right mixed up."

To the outsider and the uninitiated, the punch that she delivered to the right side of Johns head seemed, at least, a bit extreme (and so on...)

She showed him the piece of paper for a second and he read, out loud, "I am a twat."

"You've spelt twit wrong."

Catherine smiled, stood up, and started to walk towards Johns home. He followed with a nagging feeling in his head that this was the right thing to do, along with the nagging feeling of pain on either side of his cranium.

## Chapter 8

And so, in Johns room, at Johns computer desk, John read HIS book. He kept looking up at Catherine but she just ordered him back to his reading.

“You must read it John. No questions and no interruptions.”

“But... ” he tried to interject. The withering look she gave was enough and he continued to read, slowly turning over the pages with, what seemed to Catherine, reluctant dread. Could he know what was coming? Could he possibly realise that, when he reached the point where the past becomes present and heads towards the future, that he would die? At least he should die. She had been stalking him for a while and was convinced that he would not be strong enough to fight off the confusion, as he had rightly pointed out, that would consume his brain. He would die of a massive brain haemorrhage that would leave the rest of his body in good working order. She looked across at John, now obediently reading and changed her last observation to simply working order.

It was almost five hours since he started reading and the pages were being turned with more and more speed and Catherine was starting to prepare herself to transform her brain into that of Johns still warm, and usable body. To renew his brain with hers and to become flesh again. She would slowly transform his fat, sweaty, body into hers (hence his seeming recognition of her) and she could once again walk the earth wreaking havoc and mayhem wherever she went. Destiny would soon return.

He kept reading and turning, reading and turning and as the moment approached she silently said the incantations that would allow the transition of brains. Her heart would be pounding, if only she had one, but she soon would and she felt it was probably starting to pound for her anyway, inside her preys body.

More pages and then a muttering from John “OH, this is todays page... ” This was it and she tensed her lifeless body into readiness. Any moment now he would look up in fear, in pain, in dying and she

would be made whole once again. Moments passed and then John turned round and looked at her with a sudden rush of fear and then finally it didn't happen.

"WHY ARE YOU NOT DYING?" Catherine screamed at him with such a rage that, it seemed, the whole room shook (it didn't, just a literary expression). "You should be DYING!"

John looked at this old lady cowering over him and managed to cry "Why should I Die?"

"The BOOK" she was starting to be overcome with the intensity of the moments that were passing. She should by now have transferred herself into John's body "You should die when you read the BOOK!"

He looked back at her with such fear that he could almost not move, not speak, not piss himself. But he managed to talk, to ask the question that had been bothering him for the last five hours, and almost silently he asked the old woman "Who is this Steve the book keeps going on about?"

## Chapter 9

Several weeks later an old woman walked up to the front door of a non-descript terraced house and rang the doorbell. No answer so she tried again before knocking on the door. Still nothing. So she tapped, at first, on the window which soon became a banging and then a thumping but still nothing. Then with a sigh she walked back to the door, bent down, opened the letter box and shouted through it "STEVE, I KNOW YOU ARE IN THERE..." She stood back up and looked down at the heavy battered book in her hand and said, almost silently, to herself "this had better be the right fucking book this time..."

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