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With Due Warrant

"You!"

The voice was a shot, fired outward across the dry land into the wind needlessly, in a place where sight traveled much further. For the past twenty minutes both men had singularly witnessed the slow progress of the lower man's approach up the ridge towards Division, who's eyebrows now flexed in the speeding air. To the idiot shout he made no response or acknowledgment, continuing to watch as his uninvited companion fought to press his weight upward against the steep scrub and rock surface. The shadows suddenly seemed to grow by inches in the setting sun, and the wind whipped over the ridge, sending a new chorus of buffeting shakes down the long, ancient chain-link fence running its length. Division stood with his back to the fence.

The oncoming man did not speak again so wastefully until he was almost to the top of the ridge and only a few rocks lay in the vertical distance between himself and Division, roughly ten paces away. There he stopped and took a breath, raising his head to allow the wind to cool his neck, bathed in sweat despite the low temperature of the ridge. In his gloved hand he held a folded piece of paper.

"You... you, Division."

Perhaps the utterance was meant to be a question, but if so, the rising inflection was cut off by the additional quest for oxygen. By way of response, Division nodded his head once, dipping his chin briefly to the level of his parka, before bringing it back up to a level position.

"Then sir—it is my duty to inform you that you are under arrest."

He held the paper in his hand outward from his body, about at the level with his waist. He gripped it tightly, but only with his fingertips, keeping a steady, dagger-sort of balance on the object. Division said nothing. The wind blew past over the ridge in another gust, buffeting the paper. He did not withdraw it.

The man spoke again to punctuate, his heavy, stock-issue coat hiding most of his body language. "You are under arrest, on the orders of those whom I'm sure you know." He glanced up, avoiding looking directly at Division, instead inspecting the bit of ground between them, which was quite bare except for the few rocks—it was black, crusted, wind-burnt dirt. The terrain displayed no reaction.

"So... you will come along with me now, then?" This was meant to not be a question, but perhaps this statement had inherited the rising infection lost from the earlier statement. Lowering the paper to his side, he moved a quarter-turn downhill.

"I want you to read it."

The man froze. He opened his mouth, but then closed it. Looking upward, he was met by a direct gaze. Gravity

pulled him backward against his balance, but he fought it, digging in his heels in a martial act of stability.

"You want me... to read it to you?" Now he held the paper almost behind his body, as if eclipsing the document from Division's sight.

"I want you to read it to me."

Below, the man's immobility was a dance of nervousness. Division saw several of the black shadows leaping in mockery, blowing with the wind, leaping back and forth in front of him through the shaking diamonds of the chain-link fence.

"But—you know what it says." The gloved fingers around the paper procrastinated, gently rubbing the two folded halves together.

Neither man spoke. The wind pulled at everything on the ridge in rapid tidal gusts, first one direction, than the other. The lower man looked up to the other, his eyes uncomprehending.

"Look, Division—just come back with me now. I'm sure, once we return, anything you want to know about..."

"You must read it aloud."

"Only if you request..."

"I request it.

Glancing down at the paper in his hands, the man looked for a way out of the situation. Below, the dry valley spread out indefinitely, a vacuous source of solace. To either side, the ridge simply continued, the fence curling away with it until disappearing from view over the next rise.

"It's just that..."

"Read it."

There was no other option. He raised the paper, and as he could delay no longer, he quickly unfolded it, holding the top and the bottom with either hand against the motion of the air, which at any moment could have taken the paper outward into the void behind him. Division stared down the distance between them. The shadows swung out at them now, like small birds swinging on the branches of a grove of trees under gathering clouds.

"Let it be known that here, on this twenty-fourth day of the month, the court has saw fit to call Mister William Division before it, so that he might present his sworn testimony for the benefit of the body..."

His voice had staggered as he started, but gained balance as the rhythm of the familiar legal language acquired its cadence. His eyes, following the shapes of the letters joining into words, did not notice the edges of the shadows beginning to separate from the crags the earth and the fence.

"...so that they might better judge the evidence in question. Whereas, Mister William Division, as a reputed witness to the matter at hand, might be solely capable of a providing information pertaining to the case..."

The first shadows spread their wings, and launched outward from the fence, single black wings gliding in a wide arc

before narrowing into tightening circles around the two men on the top of the ridge. As the dark shapes fell over the uneven terrain, their passage animated the other shadows clinging to rocks the undersides of the dry branches of the dying bushes, and even the small pits in the surface of the bare earth. These small entities scattered through, waking many of their cousins in turn. Excited by their new found freedom, it took several scampering seconds before the swarm turned round, drawing onto the scent of their goal.

"...all of which, quite by necessity, is most crucial to the overall mandate of this court, burdened with the task of determining truth from falsehood. It is thereby ordered that any and all agents of the court expediently pursue the matter laid out herewith, so that the process can be dispatched with speed and accuracy, and all reasonable actions pertaining to the case might be carried out..."

The shadows now began to gain and evolve in form. They sprouted additional wings; they grew hair and unsheathed claws; saliva and mucus filled the deepening orifices; they stratified themselves into packs, flocks, and hordes, filling the air and covering the soil with a sub-sonic chatter of bug congress. They itched and scratched at their chitinous shells and drying membranes, struggling to tune a harmonic ligature of flesh to bone in these new-found bodies. Some found this balance and raised themselves up upon tightening legs; others remained trapped in physiological discord and quietly turned the pain inward, searching out such crawling, wriggling, and squirming forms of locomotion as would express their mis-fit.

Suddenly the man noticed the shapes approaching, in the corners of his eyes not fully absorbed by the paper. Fear reached him with a sudden gust, buffeting his stature as well as the small slip in his grasp. Overcome, he stuttered in his recitation. His head snapped from side to side in disbelief of the species he saw bearing down upon him with the unmistakable inertia of their various viscous entropies, that dark terror born upon the fuming, stalking, swarming, creeping, and the sharp infectious deaths they were all too anxious to be delivering. As the shadows drew nearer, there was no escape. In either a last resort or a retreat to neurotic habit, he turned back to the paper, held quaking before him in double unsteady hands, his voice rising in pitch, attempting to be heard over the grunts, groans, and shrieks of the animals surrounding him:

"...and so, we command that William Division be placed under arrest and transported to the location of the court so that, at which time as it occurs, he can be put to question and inquiry for the..."

The rest of what he might have read was drowned from the raucous wind by the snarls of the beasts, drawn over him like a dark blanket, swallowing up the remaining light from the setting sun. Their howls and screams swelled, fed by group satisfaction in tasting their quarry. Wings flapped the air into torrents, and rocks were set rolling down the ridge by the scratching and digging of tooth and claw. The black, writhing mass collapsed in upon itself, sending the shadows exploding outward in a suddenly expanding pool of water released upon rock, and a sudden splash of dark blood into the dry ground. The shadows slowly sunk, shapeless now, seeping back into their inset holes and depressions. As they re-attained their natural sense of light and darkness, the fence and the surrounding hill gleamed in bright contrast to the sky for a single moment, before fading into deepening dusk.

The man who remained bent forward to pick up the piece of paper lying those few steps down the hill, before the breeze could carry it off. Division raised his eyebrows, but thinking better of it, placed the document into his pocket without unfolding it. He stepped forward, continuing his journey across the ridge, into the darkening twilight.