

Artists' Society

Von Syntis

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Prolog: The Way has been made without you.

"Take back the night", said the boy. He didn't understand what was meant, but he also didn't care about this. He just met the boy accidentally. Both of them came along this street from opposing directions and ran into each other.

"Sorry, what do you mean?" He took a closer look at him. On the first sight he may have looked filthy and creepy but this was just on the surface. Beneath it, he had white teeth, short brown hair and his young face was shaved.

"Take back the night. There is more need for midday's light."

"Oh boy, it is half past eleven pm. What do you think should I do about this?" The boy grinned and the next thing Joe could remember was the pain all over his body.

Someone had beaten his head badly. As he touched it, he reached an area barely bleeding, but his hair was stuck together from the blood, so it was supposed to be better being treated, than lying alone in the dark.

He took a look around. At first he didn't see a thing. But surprisingly his eyes got used to the dark and almost unnaturally sharp was his sight. Joe was definitely in a warehouse with lots of boxes around him. It seemed to him, that this was arranged to cover him from strange looks. That was not something to calm him down. He listened carefully but there was no sign of others in the nearby surrounding. As he tried to get up he felt twisted around and his evening-meal was about to return. Just with a conscious afford he managed to get finally up on his feet. "Dear, this is strange." Joe tried to get hold on this boxes, because his legs were still slightly shaky. "This is a hell of a nightmare. I shouldn't drink that stuff again..."

He recapitulated the evening. His old friend Mike had called him surprisingly and asked to meet him in the 'prancing pony', a pub, a freaky fan of Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' had opened about a year ago. "Hey, Joe! How are things going? Will ya meet me in the 'prancing pony' this night?" Mike had asked. Joe was so perplex that he could hardly refuse. "Sure... I didn't know you're in town. When did ya return??" – "See me at 9 pm, I'll explain later" Mike had said laughingly and hung up.

Considering Mike's habit for long speeches, this was more than unusual. But Joe knew, he would not get away from the 'prancing pony' without exactly one of those long speeches. Maybe he had to endure even two of them for they haven't met for a damn long time. Joe had smiled about his upcoming memories. *Yeah, we had lots of fun back then.* In school hadn't passed a day they weren't together and playing tricks on everyone.

Now he started to wonder. Mike was supposed to have lived the past 6 years somewhere in the middle east. Some sort of peacekeeper or something. Every now and then they had a telephone call and some letters, but Mike always stressed he wasn't able to come home for a vacation. And the past 3 years Mike had complained that besides him – Joe – no one else replied anymore, neither the phone nor his letters. *So, how did Mike get to know the 'prancing pony'?* Joe himself hadn't been there yet. And according to Mike's explanations he had called him right away from the airport. After their visit there, Joe could say that the 'prancing pony' was a nice little pub, but it was nothing more. But in his thoughts he stressed the attribute little. *Yeah, little it was indeed.* Too little to have any advertising.

Besides his current situation – he had been struck down, was in a completely dark warehouse and it seemed that he was all alone – he was about to develop a full grown

paranoia towards his best friend.

The optimist in him asked himself, what he should tell his boss tomorrow. Doubtlessly he had to pay a visit to a doctor. And of course, he needed a shower, other clothes... and, thinking of it, some sleep would be fantastic. But it was so damn cold in that warehouse, that the optimist within him grew silent. Another closer look around his prison made him see a dark irregularly shaped mark on the ground, just where he had lied. "What the heck...?" He tried to squat next to that mark to have a closer look, but failed and almost fell. With another try he was close enough to notice, that there had been a liquid. There was a faint but yet strange smell in the air and he suspected that mark to be the source. Reconsidering the wound on his head and this mark, he felt very weak all of a sudden. *No... That can't be. Dear, that had to be at least a gallon. Man, if that is my blood, I should be dead by now.* Automatically he went for his pulse. His fingers sought in vain, hysterically. "Where is it, where, where, where...???" He tried to calm himself down, but had little success. He sat down and stared at this mark, and thought, that he could feel the blood loss instantly. Desperation had a tight grip on him. "I'm about to die, I gonna die, ... die... die as dead, I'll be gone, all alone... die..." His voice died away. There was no reasoning in him anymore – so he did not understand, nor embrace what had happened to him. After all, it appeared to be the tragedy of his life and he was his exclusive audience. Thus he felt to be the unhappiest man ever to have lived upon the worlds cruel face and slowly fainted away, out of his own misery.

Kapitel 1: Smell the air as a newborn.

Joe woke up, too tired to get up and felt sick. He tried rubbing his head. Incredible headaches tormented him, whenever he tried to move more than an inch. Those few spots of light that peered through the curtain felt like little daggers stabbing his eyes. Altogether the urgent need to vomit completed his assessment, that he had to much of this alcohol-replacement. Slowly his memory came up with his recollection of the last night. As struck by a lightning he explored the back of his head. If this recollection was accurate, there should be a wound or some scurf. And he also should be dead. The terrifying feeling of loneliness returned. *I must be dead!* But there was no such wound. Despite this entire feeling of being sick he jumped out of his – *mine!* – bed to his feet and speeded up to get to the bathroom. Finally there he was overwhelmed by a scent, so familiar but also as if it was something poisonous. This sensation terrified him. He freaked out. Again, just like the night before, – *When I faded out!* – hysteria and terror established their tight grip upon him. He stumbled because of his own feet and fell. All this rapid movement made him feel the urgent need to vomit even more urgent, until it overwhelmed him where he was. He managed to get to the big white telephone and emptied himself to the last he had to offer. That actually did not make him feel any better, but he convinced himself, that at least he got rid of this damned urge. With a towel he had torn down while he had fallen, he tried to clean his face, but it seemed helpless after all. After this, he got back on his feet in a pretty long winded way. When his gaze met the mirror he frowned. "I am as pale as I should be..." He was indeed pale, but one might take into consideration the circumstances: The last night he had certainly drunk a lot, and just moments ago he vomited his life out of his body – who wouldn't look pale? But with the hysteria coming, the reasoning had left again. Joe turned himself before the mirror, tried to see the rear of his head. Failing to see anything he got his little glass, but he couldn't find anything at all. All his movements were hectic and made no sense after all. A thought struck him like a lightning: Apparently he was home. He had to have gotten there somehow, for he had no recollection of his way home. So, that mysterious person, who had brought him here, may also have washed him. This thought was scary. He felt seduced. What the heck happened that night?? He sniffed; maybe he could smell fresh shampoo or whatever. Anything, that might help to understand. Immediately something stabbed his nostrils, made its way up his nose and directly into his brain. This stank caused him to tumble and almost struck him. "What is this...?" His hands found their way to his nose without his conscious help. Carefully he tried to determine what caused this odour. His gaze met the toilette – *dear, of course it stinks!* – he pushed the button and the gros of the mess was gone never to be seen again. This inner alertness and a high adrenaline level caused something, his reasoning consciousness could not manage, it calmed him down – though this was a pretty wired way of achieving this. In the manner of an experienced detective he took a closer look of his bathroom. But except for the mess he had caused himself, he could not find any evidence that there was something different. There was the glass with his toothbrush, his comb, the razor, the aftershave his ex-girlfriend had given him last Christmas, shampoo and shower-gel that were presents from his boss for his five year jubilee (one might consider this as a sign, but not Joe, however) were also where they were supposed to be, not half an inch was their position changed. He tried to recall the smell, and what it was, that made it seem

familiar. *What a strange day! Yeah, it had something in common with his aftershave.* He reached for the bottle, opened it, and before he made any attempt to smell on purpose, it jumped right in his head. "Uha, disgusting!!" He prevented himself from dropping the bottle. His unconscious self knew the consequences: *even more stink and you may not escape this disaster alive!* Hasty he concealed the bottle again and put it cautiously back at its former place. *So, my aftershave's gone renegade on me. What's next?* As a precaution he tried any containment he could find in his bathroom. And the shocking revelation was: *there is a stink upon all of them!* Each had its specific fragrance, but it was so distorted, Joe wished nothing else but swift flight. He had no clue, how this might help him to understand anything. He left the bathroom for the many different fragrances mingled to one penetrating bad smell he could not stand another second. His next stop was the kitchen. *I need coffee, loads of it.* And then something popped up in his mind, his ex-girlfriend had once said: *"The coffeebeans help your nose to recover. More than three different fragrances and you're totally lost."* He had accompanied her to a perfumery and was lost in all this different odours right from the start. This was her advice. *She had to know, she loved perfumes and such stuff.* He rolled his eyes. Finally, as if this day hadn't started bad enough, it reminded him constantly of his failed relationship. The failure wasn't exactly what bothered him about this, just the fact, that this relationship had come into existence in the first place. He put his most determined grin on his face and entered the sacred space in the kitchen. One has to know about Joe, that he loved his single being – which was generally considered quite odd – and of course, that he had arranged his life around it. His small kitchen wasn't a real single kitchen at all – for he loved cooking he had heater with four plates and his entire stuff was at least fit for five additional visitors to join, the fridge wasn't such a small thing you may mistake for the minibar, nothing like that, it was just a bit crowded in there. And by referring to the sacred space is the area around his fridge and coffeemaker meant. Joe always enjoyed diversity – maybe a reason why he had broken up with his former girlfriend – and this covered all respects of his life. He had some ten sorts of tea in bags and another ten lose, also at least three sorts of coffee beans – his coffeemaker had an integrated mill -, different sorts of ketchup, and whatsoever may please one, fond of diversity. Maybe he was one of the few men who actually had matching shoes for each style of outfit he possessed. And he could afford it. *Or could have?* When he stretched out his hand for the strongest coffee blend his gaze came across the big artful watch – a present Mike had sent some years ago with this note on the card: 'The only thing I possible could send you, you may be able to read or understand. Greetings, yours Mike.' – and Joe froze. *It's half past ten????* He wished he'd died last night. He was more than two hours late for his shift. "Oh man, what shall I do now??" He was tempted to throw everything aside, jump into his clothes and break his personal record of seven minutes and thirty-eight seconds to get to work. *But what good would that do me? None. Maybe I am not even an employee anymore.* He prepared his coffee, took a deep breath through his nose to relieve his smell sense. Then he trotted into his personal home office and fetched the phone. He took another deep breath and tried to sound as bad, as he felt. He had to try to rescue his job after all. The number of his boss' office was almost dialled by itself. When the connection was finally established and Mr. Revell surprisingly answered himself, Joe was dazzled. "Hello? Joe, is that you?" Joe found it odd, to be called by his first name by a superior but they handled it like this in that department. After clearing his throat twice, Joe found his voice, but his answer was still weak and somehow threatened to faint away. "Yeah, it's me," he paused for an

eye blink, not sure whether he should continue to call him Martin, or shift to Mr. Revell. But since his superior sounded all friendly, he thought to try his luck. "Martin. I presume you noticed me missing? I just want to call in, I feel rather sick-", after he found his courage to say this, he was shocked, that Martin interrupted him thus. "Yeah, I thought something like that. I mean, I had been warned by your friend. He-", this revelation, or merely what he suspected to be the core of Martin's answer caused a tingling between his ears. "You were warned? How's that possible? I didn't know this until five minutes ago when I noticed how late it was..." His voice died away for there was nothing to add, but Martin burst out in laughter. "See, your friend told me you might say that." Joe found it hard to understand Martin through his laughter, but he got the bottom-line of this. "He did? Who the...? Wait, that friend's name wasn't Mike, was it?!" He barely managed to keep the hysteria out of his voice. *There it is again. Again, those paranoid thoughts towards Mike.* "Yeah, I think Mike was his name. Seemed a nice fella to me. He told me, you were old school friends and haven't seen within the last six years. For you have already worked more hours, than necessary, I thought, I give you a free day anyway. Hope you'll be able to enjoy it." Joe could almost hear the smiley at the end of that sentence. Today his thinking went strange paths. *What the hell is happening to me?* Desperation poured all over and through him. He felt like drifting in a wild but well temperatured river. "Yeah, I'll work on the enjoying. Thank you anyway. Then we'll see tomorrow." He hung up.

The only thing he was able to do immediately was starring at the phone. For a second he played with the thought to call Mike. *But what to say?* Joe wasn't ready to appear as a complete fool in front of his best friend. *Not by accusing him of... yeah, what? Maybe I am just overworked?* He trotted back in the kitchen and brewed his coffee. While waiting that the coffee maker finished its miraculous work, he send his gaze out of the kitchen's window. Outside it was another rather rainy day. But those glimpses through the clouds where promising. Joe took a full cup of coffee and sniffed its odour right away. It was indeed pretty intense. *What a interesting revelation!* It seemed almost, that his sense of smell had improved dramatically. *How's that possible? And even more important, why?* He sipped his coffee and was startled. *What a taste!* But in a second thought he knew why. *Of course, smell and taste go together.* But this was enjoyable instead of the smell problem. After finishing the cup, he dressed himself and wandered mindless through his apartment.

Everywhere he sensed strange smells, most likely he found them disgusting. He started to clean his entire flat. He could stop himself just in time, not to paint his walls again. But except that, he tried anything. He even borrowed a carpet steamer. But some hours later – he was astonishing fast in cleaning – after finishing swishing the last dust away, he was tired, but aware that all this was worth it. He had to adjust to the smell of all those cleaning chemistries, but he managed not to use too many different.

And just when he watched his achievement he noticed his own strange behaviour. *That is enough!* He recited himself back to order. *Just today and the last night were full of odd events,* and though not that much had happened in the sense of a dramatic plot in a drama, he felt like losing it. *Just too much.* He wondered, whether he'd be able to remember last night's events tomorrow or not respectively, how much of the details may be lost by then. *Maybe I should start a diary instead?* He wasn't font of all those blogs, not at all. *But some notes – just for him in private – may not hurt.*

Kapitel 2: First encounter of the strange

Dear Diary,

I am not quite sure, what I am supposed to write. Well, to be honest, I don't want to forget, what happened yesterday. Or maybe I just want to make sure, I don't go crazy... Anyway, yesterday my friend Mike called and wanted to meet me in a pub. He talked about some strange things, if I recall it correctly. Some secret institution he works for. If it were that secret, he wouldn't tell me all that in public – not as freely as he did, would he? Somehow what he said made everything sound so unreal. I can't believe I would believe a single word. Mike must have been joking... trying to play a trick on me. Yeah, that would sound just like good old Mike. It is hard to remember the details, and it hasn't been 24 hours since then and now.

Everyone knows, your life has been already arranged by the time you become 14. How can he talk about becoming some sort of artist as if it was just a simple decision? Something like what kind of bread will I have for breakfast, or what sort of trousers should I wear when I am not at work? – Of course no red ones, I might be mistake for some sort of scavenger. I am destined to be an accounting clerk, maybe one day I'll become chief assistant in my distribution, but that is it. You can't even chose in which company you work. Man, Mike should know this! This peacekeeper job must have screwed his logical thinking! But then on the other hand, they only chose already deviant subjects for those posts. I wonder how I got around it. My parents always said that Mike was a bad influence. Emerged from a degenerated line of heritage. I never told Mike about those endless counselling sessions I had to bear, just because my parents wanted to make sure I was not a deviation myself. I guess, they'd have died rather from embarrassment than let this happen. But then again, that is what good parents are supposed to do, right?

There is no one who could deny, that we had more fun in our school days than the other kids. Maybe we even contributed to their misery. No, not misery. We might have made things a little difficult, but they're not living in misery. Not back then, nor now. They've become respectable and well functioning members of our society.

Dear, if I tell my counsellor this, I'll have to bear with another endless row of counselling sessions. Hm, I'll give it a week, and if I haven't returned to normal, I'll tell her. There is no need to cause this poor woman more trouble than she already has. There are so many deviations these days. I wonder where those come from? What is it about their wish to be special anyway? I don't get that. There is nothing wrong with the way we turn out. We do have jobs, we do have homes, there is nothing that you'd miss if you want to make your decent living. And we have clear rules how to behave which they already teach in school. Oh, when I read those old-fashioned stories, I can't bear with the protagonists' problems. I mean, what kind of problems are they anyway? It is total clear how to approach a woman you're interested in, and how you can provide for your living. And their constant quarrels with what kind of government and – what the hell are terrorists anyway?

Ok, back to yesterday. Mike sure freaked me out. I felt like they might come and get us right away from the spot we were occupying. Such... blasphemy I haven't heard in a long, long time. Then again, I work in a respectable company and do not intermingle with dangerous deviant subjects... I can't tell how thrilled I was! And then this substitute alcoholic stuff! It went right into my head. I still have a headache. Oh, and this... dream. It must have been a dream. A nightmare. I haven't had any nightmares since I was six

years old. But that was a creepy one. There is no way you have to fear that someone might come and knock you out on your way home. And this warehouse... I just don't know. It felt so real. The headache, at least, is real. Too real. I don't wanna know, how it must have felt if I had drank real alcohol ... but it is prohibited anyway. And Martin was playing along. There is no way that a distinguished man like Martin would have collaborated with some one like Mike. Ok, Mike can be damn persuasive. I'd be damned if he wasn't.

I never realised it up till now, but artists... what are artists? They tend to describe them with terms used in the old stories to describe criminal suspects. So artists are criminals? You don't hear that word often these days. I know when our cultural history teacher scolded us for our tricks, she used to say 'You think you're artists or what?'. And one day I was foolish enough to ask her what was wrong about artists... She never really explained it – but she looked so damn frightened, as if she was sorry ever having mentioned the topic. And my mother always used to say, that artists don't make a living, but just live. Everyone knows you have to work for your living... so they are some kind of parasite? Maybe like flees I thought. But now... If I could become one, I guess it is nothing like flees. Mike's description wasn't very enlightening. Artists are those who create art – that is why they are called ARTists. He couldn't belief I didn't know... I suspected something like that. So those who go into the field of entertainment and stress relieve may be considered artists? That question really upset Mike. If I hadn't paid attention in school, he asked me. That is the least job anyone wants to do. It is even lesser prestigious than scavengers. No, artists are noting like that. Da Vinci, Monet, Hundertwasser, Dali, Shakespeare – even Brecht. These were artists. Well, when I looked up the word artist in my lexicon this evening, the description pretty much hit the core of what we call deviation. That still thrills me. I mean, who wonders if I get nightmares when my best friend tries to turn me into a deviation!! I just can't believe this.

And how long it took me to realise that all this being struck down and being alone in a dark warehouse where I slowly bled to death... well, that this was just a nightmare! I actually panicked when I woke up in my own bed. Where else am I supposed to wake up?! I thought there was some sort of conspiracy going on. As to be expected – after all it was just a dream! – was the wound on my head gone. I wanted to look – I was so sure there must have been some scurf or ... something. And I was overwhelmed from some disgusting smell in my own bathunit! And all these conspiracy thoughts didn't just vanish. ... I really cleaned my entire flat. On the bright side, it is clean, as the rental contract demands. But I still feel as if I have made a complete fool of myself.

Oh dear! It is already this late! This day was one of the strangest in my entire life. Dear diary, I am not sure, if this will really help me to remember everything. But then again, I have never had a diary before. That is something they consider to be rather a trait of those subjects who have a tendency to become a deviation. ... You just need to look at all those blogs. These self-important ... individuals! My mother would want me to wash my mouth if she had heard me use that despicable word. Well, I was about to brush my teeth anyway.