



Talking to Myself

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I have a story to tell and I have to tell it quickly before I forget. I can already feel it dribbling away; the details of the picture are melting in my grasp like a painting by Dali, leaving me with just the bare bones of a tale, a dreamscape memory of fragmented ideas and interwoven feelings. I *need* to tell this story. My very life depends on it, I think.

I don't know, I can't remember. It's important: that I do know, if only to me. If I delay any longer then there won't be enough left to make any sense. Maybe if I just start talking it will come back to me as I tell it?

But what is that noise? That incessant muffled pounding, like a submerged gong calling time on the fishes. Where was I? What was I saying? My story, yes! I have to tell my story. The pounding in my head is taking it away from me, that rhythmic beating is reverberating through my skull and eating out the contents of my memory. It's important, important that I remember. Something is about to happen to me, something is coming. I can feel the tension in the air as if my whole being is about to metamorphosize.

I *need* this memory. I need to be able to hold on to it when I awake. Awake? Am I asleep? No. I am conscious; I am aware but..... am I awake?

I'm wasting time and time is something that I don't feel I have much of. I have to piece this story together and I have to hold on to it. I have to hold on to it! What is the last thing I remember? Imperative. It was imperative. I had to do something; I had to be somewhere. Where was I? What was it I needed to do? And what was stopping me? Something was stopping me from what I had to do; from being where I needed to be. What was it? Who was it? *Somebody* was stopping me. There was somebody in front of me and they wouldn't let me pass.

A man? Was it a man? I don't recall his face; just a voice, but I'm confusing it with *my* voice. All I can remember is the tones and the inflections of my own timbre, but with

another man's words being spoken. He asked me a question and the question riled me. He asked it as if it was the most natural question to be asking me, but I couldn't see the relevance of such a question; not when I was in so much of a hurry to get passed him.

'What have you done?' he asked,

'I haven't done anything', I replied, all the while searching for a way around him, but there wasn't one.

Where were we?

There was nothing else; at least ~ I don't *remember* anything else. Why did I need to get past him and why would he not stand aside for me?

He was blocking a door, but he wasn't; there was no door, there was just him.

Us. Him and me.

But there had to be *something* beyond him, or else why was I so desperate to pass?

'What do you remember?', he continued, and that was when I first began to hear/feel the noise. It was... *calling* to me; Drawing me away from him; pulling me toward it, but I didn't want to hear it; didn't want to follow it. I needed to go forward; to get past the man.

Was he a man?

Or an idea of a man,

given form by a mind so desperate to piece this episode together. I tried then as I'm trying now, but I couldn't remember anything at all.

'I need to get...*past*', I said, a little uncertainly. I didn't know why I needed to get past him, I just knew that I needed to resist that booming bell.

'Explain yourself', said the man who sounded exactly like me.

'I...can't', I stammered, 'I don't know why, but I just need to get past you.'

'What do you remember?'

'Nothing. *Nothing!*,' I pressed.

The noise was getting louder; closer. My anxiety was palpable.

'Please,' I pleaded, 'I don't know why, but I need to get past you.'

'It is your imperative,' he replied reasonably, but I was no longer in a reasonable state of mind. I considered using force, but instinctively knew that I couldn't win. He was me, I was him. We were perfectly matched, physically and mentally.

'Why won't you let me pass?'

'Because you don't remember.'

But remember what, I thought? Was there a password? Did he need to be bribed? Was I being tested? Why couldn't I remember?

The belled tolled ever closer. That's when I looked down and my heart sank. I was naked. I had forgotten my clothes. But how was that possible? How could I have set out without my clothes without noticing?

Maybe I was dreaming? That always happens in dreams. Just when you think that things couldn't get any worse you realise that you are naked. But this didn't feel like a dream.

'Is there a dress code?', I enquired, sheepishly.

'No', he said, 'You are as you should be'.

'Really?', I replied, 'Then will you please let me in? It's cold out here'.

I could feel it now, though I hadn't noticed it up to that point. Something was telling me that if I was just able to get past him then I would be warm and safe from that ever nearing beat.

'What have you done?' He/I repeated.

'I told you!', I spat, angry now, self conscious standing before him as naked as the day I was born and getting colder by the second,

'I haven't done anything!'.

This wasn't a dream; it was too real, yet nothing was making any sense, unless...

'I'm dead, aren't I? I asked resignedly, 'look, *honestly*: I haven't done anything wrong. I've led a really dull, uneventful life, I think.'

To be fair I couldn't really remember, but I felt certain that if I *had* done anything interesting then I would have remembered it. I could feel my brain shaking in its cage; the pounding timpani was so close now; its pull impossible to resist.

'You shall not pass,' he told me defiantly.

'But that isn't fair!' I implored.

'I haven't done anything wrong! I thought that was a prerequisite for entrance to heaven? I'm innocent! I'm boring!

'Who said anything about heaven?' he returned, without a hint of sarcasm.

'Boom! Boom!' Went the drums, so loud now that I found myself shouting above them to be heard. His voice, though stayed calm and audible throughout our exchange.

'What have you done?'

'Nothing!' I shouted, 'I haven't done anything!'

'And that is why you shall not pass,' he said with infuriating serenity. 'Your life has been wasted,' he finally began to explain, as I dropped to my knees and clutched at my aching ear, 'you have learned nothing that you did not know when you last stood here before me. You changed nothing in the world around you; you touched nobody. You left nothing that you will be remembered for.

That is why you do not remember: you have done nothing that *can* be remembered after your soul has left its shell.

Only those whose mark can be felt by the other souls around them may transcend to the next level.'

I was crying by now; my eyes screwed tightly closed in order to shut out what had become a cacophony of rhythmic beats inside my skull.

'You will return to the first level. You will be wiped clean by the beating of your host's heart. You will be reborn into the world which you have just left and you will begin again'.

I wrenched open my eyes against the pain in my head. He was still there before me, unaffected by the deafening roar that seemed to emanate from the very substance around me.

'No, wait!' I called, panic rising as his features began to blur,

'You can't do this to me!' I fell back to the floor and pulled myself tightly into a foetal curl against the pulsating sound, 'How...'

I faltered, as the vision of myself as I had been dissipated in my mind's eye, 'how...how will I know what I have to do if I don't remember? If I can't remember the life that I have just lived, then how will I know that the next life has to be better?'

I was warm, now and cosy in my amniotic tank. The pounding drums had settled to a comforting rhythmic... heart beat. A twinge; a contraction; a slight shift as I am pushed back toward the light at the end of the tunnel.

I must remember. I must remember my story. It's important, if only to me. I can't forget, this time or I will be forced to keep playing out this level for all eternity.

I must remember. I must remember. I must...I must..I