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1,100 WORDS  
DECEMBER 2011

# Blank Stained Page

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*A man has to explain himself when he claims he can only communicate with a small notepad*

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It's funny, whenever I find myself in a rough spot I spend almost as much time contemplating how I got there as I do figuring a way out of it, as though by isolating some instance where I turned left when I should have gone right, I may be able to eliminate the path which followed.

My sweaty palm was gripping the cool chrome door handle when the cop car pulled in the bank parking lot and swung in right behind me, blocking me in. I felt my cheeks start to burn and became keenly aware of my heartbeat, but composed myself best I could as I watched the man in the mirror in the navy blue uniform exit the vehicle and approach the yellow Nova I borrowed from the Wal-Mart parking lot. I won't say stole, because when you have every intention of returning something you took, that's called borrowing.

As the officer approached I pushed two of the four objects in my lap onto the floor and kicked them under the seat, leaving the small wallet-sized spiral notebook with a green cover and a silver engraved pen which wrote in blue ink. I flipped through the pages of scribbled notes in block lettering, past the note I'd already written for the teller, and then found a blank page. I hunched over the steering wheel and rushed out a new communication.

By the time the cop tapped his knuckles on the driver's side window the message was near finished. Without looking up I extended an index finger to the man in blue, who seemed to take a moment to absorb the gesture, then knocked again a little harder. I could feel the vibrations from the glass and thought of how they always said not bang on the tank windows at sea world. I nodded my head as I finished my note and then rolled the window down, and as he was requesting my license and registration I handed the cop the small pad.

The officer jerked back a bit on instinct as I extended my arm, appeared apprehensive for a moment, then took the message. He studied what I'd written, looked up with furrowed brow, I nodded my head and then he returned his gaze once more to the small green-covered tablet. The

message I'd scratched out there read *'Hello, sir. I suffered an injury recently which has left me mute. I have not yet learned sign language and can't read lips. I am sorry for the trouble, but can only communicate via this pad.'*

In the bright afternoon sun I could read the name on the man's crisp uniform, Redman. I studied his loose features and saw the sweat already beading on his forehead and around his thick brown mustache. He looked me over in return wondering I'm sure, among other things, why the wiry stubble-faced man before him was wearing a green M65 field jacket in the middle of July. I always wear it though, whether in extreme heat or biting cold I haven't removed the thing since my discharge, most nights I even sleep in it. Once past adolescence, it is generally frowned upon to carry around a safety blanket but the green jacket serves its purpose well and it draws far less sideways glances than a blanky might. If it kept me safe over there...

The heat slows time down and the silence dragged out, as he shuffled the paper back and forth with his thumb I heard a loud crow's caw. Redman stole another brief glance at me then etched a reply and handed it back through the Nova's open window. I took it and saw he'd simply transcribed in hard-to-read cursive his request for I.D. and registration. I thought for a second and then wrote back that I lived just down the road and had left my license there, was only at the bank to cash my veteran's disability compensation. He seemed rather impatient to me as I scrawled out the lengthy note but perhaps that was just my anxiety. I have to admit I was rather surprised to see a glimmer of what I took to be genuine pity on his face as he read the note and was even more shocked when the man didn't repeat his request. Instead, the message he passed back read only *'teller called us, said you'd been hanging around for over 30 min and that you left and came back twice'*. There was no question on the pad but there was one clearly

written on Redman's face. I caught the scent of onions and hoped only I could smell my perspiration.

I nodded my head slowly, then stained the blank page with a simple quick retort and handed it back. *'I get confused sometimes, forget things'*. Now it was Redman's turn to bob his head up and down. He tucked a thumb into his mock utility belt and studied me carefully. I felt like an insect under some massive probing spotlight and did my best to hide my unease. The cop just scratched on the small notebook that maybe I should get some rest at home and try again tomorrow, and at the bottom he'd written *'thank you for your service'*. After pretending to consider this I nodded again and gave Redman a weak toothless smile, as though I were embarrassed or accepting some defeat.

After officer Redman exited the bank parking lot heading west I waited a few moments and then drove away in the opposite direction. I stopped at a red light in a lane with two overlapping arrows, offering two available paths to continue down – one pointing straight ahead and the other curved left for turners or those wishing to head back in the direction they'd come. I tossed the notebook and pen on the floor and kicked them under the seat, to rest once more beside the black facemask and gun. I let out a breath I'd been holding since the cop car had pulled in behind me.

"Jesus. I can't believe that worked." I said aloud.

I sat there waiting for the light to change, and wondered which way I'd go when it did.