

Samuel Roen
sproen@student.fullsail.edu

about 800 words

The Whispers

By Samuel Roen

The man wore red shoes and white pajamas. Well-worn bandages covered a third of his body. Though odd in itself this wasn't what intrigued me. It was in the way he walked.

I couldn't help myself. When I saw him out the window, walking past the church across the way, I threw on a pair of sneakers, left my apartment and followed.

Once outside, it didn't take me long to spot the dude. He was near the church graveyard with his hands grasping the black metal fence that kept him separate from the dead. Near leafless trees with little white budding flowers watched over the graves.

Though the night was still the man swayed a bit like a flame...one small gust of wind away from turning to smoke. He glanced up at the black sky and nodded gravely at the lone glimmering star. With that, he was off and on his way toward downtown.

I wasn't sure why I followed. There was just something impossibly familiar about him. And, though I couldn't

entirely tell his age, he must've been nearing his seventies - his hair white and spiky. Surely, if it came to blows, I could take him.

I hated graveyards at the best of times. But now, when I passed the long-gone dead, I swore I could hear voices whispering my name. It seemed a childish thought, so I attributed it to the wind and hurried along, making sure to keep enough distance between me and the man as I didn't want him to think me a creep even though that was exactly how I felt.

I thought to call out to him. Maybe he'd stop. Even smile. I'd introduce myself, say something funny and go along with him. I didn't, of course, because apparently I was the kind of girl who can only imagine herself talking to guys as she stalks them in the night. I decided it would probably be best if I start therapy as soon as possible.

At this early hour, when we arrived on Front Street, it was entirely dead. I checked my watch and was shocked to find a half hour had passed since I'd left my apartment, curiosity warping my sense of time. Another hour or two and the shops would start to open.

A sliver of moon lit our path. It was just the two of us as the man made his way onto the Riverwalk. The only sound came from our footsteps, which I synced with his so

he wouldn't notice me. Then he stopped. In front of him, blocking his path, stood a large possum. Neither moved. They simply stared at each other. For how long, I wasn't entirely sure. Now seemed as good a time as any to find my way back home, but I found myself in a trance-like bliss with no intention of leaving. Finally, the man performed a low bow. I may have imagined it, but the possum did the same before scurrying off into the distance.

The man turned to me. Though I had no recollection of moving, I wasn't at all surprised to find myself face to face with him. He wasn't as old as I'd originally coined him, and his bandages were nowhere to be seen. His eyes were his most striking feature...each a different shade of blue. Even though we'd never met before, he smiled at me like we were old friends. It was infectious and I did the same.

When he offered his hand, I took it without hesitation, thinking he was going to ask me to dance. Instead, he climbed up onto the railing. With his help, I hoisted myself up as well.

The water was calm as we swayed back and forth. His gaze was fixated on the water below, as I looked up to the heavens, appreciating the only star in the night sky. Even when he released my hand and jumped into the water, I never

felt I was in danger. I merely waited for him to pop back up to the surface. But he never did. Seconds passed. Then minutes.

The whispers, the same ones from the graveyard, came back to me, as I reached into my pocket, and pulled out my cell phone. I wondered how they knew my name. They stayed with me as I typed a quick text to my mom and dropped the phone into the water.

One last deep breath and I jumped, letting the water take me. At first, I didn't understand. And then I wondered how I hadn't always known.