

## THE CURE

Chicago in the spring. It used to be freezing this time of year but now it's quite warm for March. Global warming I'm sure. No matter, I think I'll read my paper outside. When I say warm I mean nearer to the mid fifties, but I do like the cold air. It invigorates me, wakes me up, gets me ready for my day. Most people don't enjoy it; this is why I get strange looks whenever I go outside. I unload a few chairs off a table and settle in. Set my paper in the middle, my venti latte to the right and my scone up top. I stir four packets of sugar into my latte; they were out of currant scones so I am forced to enjoy a chocolate one instead. Now that everything is just right I open my paper to read the headlines of the day.

Marine Convoy Ambushed Outside Baghdad

20's Film Starlet Monica Macovoy Dies at 92

University of Chicago Sophomore Gunned Down on Street

Corner

Bush Vetoes Health Bill

I take a moment from my headline skimming to test my latte's heat factor. Mmm, almost there. I break off a

chunk of scone, letting it fall apart in my mouth; I detest the sound of loud chewing. While I wait for my latte to cool I go back to my paper to finish reading about the six marines. War, what a fetid business. Part two deals with war quite thoroughly. I should make mention of these marines in my rewrites. Enough of this, my latte should be... perfect. A long sip and I'm ready to read about-  
"Hello, Michael."

A tall man looks down on me. He's dressed quite average, jeans with an olive green parka. Below the parka I can make out a bowling style shirt; it has flames and a topless woman holding a martini glass... tacky. But the one feature that stands out is his white skin. Very white skin. If it weren't for his thick black hair accompanied by his bushy black eyebrows I'd swear he was an albino. All the same he looks as if his skin has never seen a second of sunlight. Perhaps he was one of those 'vampires' the kids seem to be so fond of. I wait for him to speak again so I can get a look at his teeth, some of these people actually file their teeth into sharp fangs, or spend outrageous amounts of money for fake ones. But he says nothing; he just looks at me.

"Hello, do I know you?"

"No, you wouldn't." He gestures to the chair across from me.

"Please." He sits down, hands in pockets, smiling. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I was hoping we could talk."

"What would you care to talk about?" Any normal person would ask a complete stranger to take their leave, but not me. Darn these manners.

"Your book." He says.

"My what?" The book?

"Your book." He repeats, the smile never leaves his face.

"I'm-I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about." I've never desired to be a liar. "I've written no book." Except for now.

"You will."

"I will? I will write a book? How could you possibly know that I will write a book?"

"Because I," he leans in close to me; "am from the future."

I couldn't help but laugh. Out loud. I am not a fan of the science fiction, as a boy I never read comic books. So this future stuff was just ludicrous. "Listen friend-I'm afraid I didn't get your name."

"John."

"Well, John, I do appreciate your comedy and I'm told a good laugh in the morning is a great way to begin your day. Tell you what, come back tomorrow morning with more of your jokes and I'll tell you how they made my day. But if you don't mind for now I'd like to get back to my latte, my scone and my paper."

"That's the most you've ever said at one time to another person, outside of your classroom lectures, of course. You're a man of ideas, Michael. You have so many great ideas and you write them down because you're afraid to speak them aloud. But they're brilliant; they're ideas that will inspire millions to make life altering changes. Ideas that will upset the status quo, they will turn the social hierarchy of the free world upside down. Old money will lose trillions. Money will trickle down to the middle and lower classes and people will experience an equality never before seen in the history of mankind. The wealthiest one percent will no longer rule and a pure unpolluted democracy will finally exist." John relaxes back into his chair. What do I say to this man? I've told no one about my book and now here he is telling me that my book will change the world. Unless...

"Did Parker put you up to this?"

"I think we both know Parker has neither the imagination nor the sense of humor to pull off a prank like this." He's right, Parker doesn't. But Parker is my only friend; he's the first person I had planned to tell about the book.

"So, this book of mine--"

"`The Cure'."

My God! He knows the title too? I must keep my calm.

"`The Cure' is supposed to change the world?" He nods. "And you're here from the future to help me write it?" He shakes his head no. "Motivate me?" Another no. "Why are you here then?"

John's smile disappears. "I'm here to kill you."

I almost spit out my latte. "To kill me?" That's a rude way to begin a conversation. "You mean to kill me for a book I haven't written?"

"Yes."

"What does my book do to you?"

"It does nothing to me, Michael. Personally I have nothing against you. It's my clients. They want you dead."

"What did I do to them?"

"I just told you, you upset the status quo. There are many people who don't want the status quo upset. They'll kill to keep that from happening."

"So you are...?"

"A professional."

"An assassin."

"There are so many names for what I do. I wished I had the imagination and creativity to come up with a new one, but I like professional the best."

"You kill people for money."

"That's a very simplistic way of looking at it. I solve problems for people who can afford my unique service."

"I hate to break this to you, but assassins have been around for thousands of years. How are you 'unique'?"

He clucks his tongue and shakes his head. "Michael, haven't you been listening? I solve problems in a unique way because of my unique talent."

"You can time travel?" I've never found an occasion to be sarcastic; I was never good at it either, so I suppose that was why I wasn't now. John reaches over and grabs my paper; he opens it to the next page and folds it. As he hands it back to me I see a familiar headline.

"Read, please."

"University of Chicago sophomore gunned down on street corner." I look to him. He nods his head again.

"Read on."

Clearly this man is sick enough not only to believe he can travel through time but that he must kill me for a book no one even knows about. I figure it best to humor him.

"Arthur Chan, a Political Science major at the University of Chicago was gunned down Thursday night after leaving a downtown restaurant. The twenty year old Chan was shot to death on the corner of Superior and Michigan. Witnesses said the five gunshots came seemingly out of nowhere. At this time police have no suspects or apparent motive for the brutal slaying."

"Arthur Chan is the first Asian-American to become President."

"An Asian-American has never been President."

"And as long as my clients keep paying me one never will."

"Okay, I'm a philosophy teacher at a small private university in the suburbs. I know nothing of physics or theories on time travel, but I do understand a bit of paradox theory. If you kill a man before he does whatever it is he's supposed to do that makes you want to kill him won't he then be unable to do that thing thereby negating

the whole purpose of you killing him? So then if you don't kill him then he does do whatever it is he's supposed to do so you will have to kill him, and so on and so forth?"

"I have thought of this before."

"Well, what happens? If you've done this before what happens after you finish your job?" He couldn't possibly be crazy enough to have figured this one out, could he?

"I don't pretend to understand it, Michael. All I know is I do my job and when I go home my clients don't even know they hired me in the first place. But I still have my money. Of course, I always get paid in advance. I learned that lesson the hard way. Now the real advantage to my talent is that there's absolutely no connection to my clients. I take out my targets ten, twenty sometimes fifty years before my clients even know they want the target eliminated. For example, the people who hired me to take care of Arthur Chan, at this time they have no idea who the young man is. And they never will."

"But you still have your money?"

"I still have my money."

"Who wants me dead?"

"The one percent."

By now my latte was cold, I had lost my appetite for a chocolate scone, but mainly my patience was wearing a bit

thin. I certainly did not want to read more about our friend exploits in the paper. "Why? Why are you telling me this? If you truly mean to-kill me, why would you sit down at my table to tell me so? Why would you be so..."

"Cruel?"

"Yes, cruel."

"Michael, when a man is assassinated he knows why. Whether he is a world leader or a federal witness or a drug dealer, what have you. When that bullet rips through his heart, when those last few seconds of life are rushing at him, he knows why. He just simply knows that he's been assassinated and for what reason. But with my gift my targets don't know why because they haven't done anything yet. Honestly I think that's cruel. Some of my targets, and you're one of them, Michael, deserve to know why. I didn't have the opportunity to speak with Arthur Chan, and in his last few seconds of life he didn't know why."

"Why do I deserve to know?"

"I like you, Michael. You're a brilliant man; I read your book, quite an amazing piece of work. It's a shame no one else will ever read it. I don't talk to all my targets, in fact I haven't admired anyone as much as you since Andrew Stevely."

"Who's Andrew Stevely?" I regretted asking as soon as the words left my mouth.

"He was a democratic senator from California. He served as Clintons Vice President becoming President in 2000. He pushed through an energy bill which eventually reduced the world's oil consumption by almost ninety-five percent. He began social welfare programs that got thousands of families off of welfare."

"Al Gore was Clinton's Vice President and George Bush won the election in 2000. And we're as dependant on oil now as we ever were." For some reason even these facts seem to be questionable to me now.

"I know, Andrew Stevely died in 1982." John glances down at the paper, he has that smile again.

"Police have no suspects and no apparent motive." I wasn't sure how much to believe him. Time travel and my book changing the world aside this man meant to kill me; that much had to be true. "I'm afraid I really don't feel comfortable talking to you anymore."

"But Michael, I have so many questions. In chapter two you speak of..."

"How can you possibly have read it? It doesn't exist! Now, please, leave me alone!"

"But how do you account for...?"

"Nothing! I account for nothing! I don't know what you're talking about. I think you have the wrong man, I'm nobody. I have no ideas, I have no book." It was high time I left so I make for the door. What if he follows me? What do I do? Scream? Call for the police? I can't possibly outrun this man.

"Michael Danforth Taylor, born on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961 in Dearborn, Michigan." Of course I stopped to listen. "You did your undergraduate work at the University of Chicago and got your Masters and PhD. at Northwestern. You've co-authored three textbooks and several articles. For the last eleven years you've taught philosophy at Coleman College. You inherited your grandfather's temperament, your father's nose and your mothers dislike for beets. When you leave here you'll go to your apartment at 4471 North Malden Avenue, apartment 3C where you've lived for the last eight years, alone." He turns around to look at me. "I have the right man."

"Please leave me alone."

"Michael, I'm truly sorry. It's not personal. It's just business."

I hurry through the coffee shop and out onto Wilson Street. My apartment is only a block away, I can run that, I think. What would I do then? Call the police. And tell

them what? Hello Officer, a man from the future is here to kill me because my book will change the world...You'll have a unit here right away? Grand, grand.

Oh God! He's following me. "Go away!" I finally reach my door and fumble with the keys. Why do people always fumble for the keys when they're being chased?

I look back. He's gone! Where did he go? I look up and down Malden but he's no where in sight. Did I just imagine all this? Was the milk in the latte bad? Was the scone past its due date? Can bad dairy make a man hallucinate? I didn't think so.

This was not the way I wanted to start my weekend. All I wanted to do was have my latte, eat a scone, read my paper, perhaps take the train to the museum. Maybe take in a movie at the Biograph followed by dinner at Joe's Crab House. That's all I need to make a nice weekend, I don't need some hallucination from the future telling me he's going to kill me.

I make it up the stairs and through my front door hurrying inside. I take off my jacket, carefully hanging it. I look out the window, no one there. It had to have been in my mind, no one knows of my book, no one. It was all in my mind, yes, that's all it was.

I think I'll take a nap before I head downtown, put all of this behind me. This will all be nothing but a bad dream come this afternoon.

I hear the window smash right before I feel the punch to my chest. Police have no suspects and no apparent motive. I didn't even hear the gunshot.

As I lie on my floor, the last few seconds of my life rushing at me I wonder if someone will find my manuscript hidden under my bed. If they do will they try to publish it? I'm sure Parker will; he's good like that.