

Collection

By: Eric Ponvelle

Winston Jones thought his heart would explode in anticipation. The contact for the pick-up said 3:45 at this coffee shop. He specifically said "Don't be late." It was 3:43. No man in sight. This had to be a set up.

As Winston felt his heart seize with every ring of the bell, he squeezed his bag tighter. The book inside the bag would make him rich, but most importantly, after this meeting, he would never see that abomination again.

3:44 and he knew it had to be a sting operation. He lifted the book from some old man who seemed to have no idea what year it was much less whether some old book was stolen. But, when Winston put the ad in that collector's magazine, he got a call the same day it was issued.

He opened his messenger bag and looked at the book. That same sick feeling he got when he first read the glyphs inside roiled in his stomach. The book from the outside

looked normal. Inside, however, were incredibly thin sheets of paper that were completely opaque with glyphs on them, tight and close together. It was a heavy book with over a few thousand pages, but the glyphs were more amazing. Glancing at them randomly, they made no sense, but as he stared at the scrawlings, he, somehow, knew what they said. As he read the book, it told of an ancient war that predated all known history. It continued as he skimmed through it through World War 2 and September 11th, then he saw the time line extend to his finding the book.

When he read his name, Winston nearly torched the book. Somehow, the book contained the history of everyone and everything as well as their future actions. The notion to find his future was nagging him, but Winston couldn't do it. Knowing how he would die or how anything else would happen would give him a heart attack. *Just like the jingling of that damn bell* he thought and saw a man walking towards him. He glanced at his clock on his phone: it said 3:45:00.

The man wore a long coat that was dark black. His head was covered with a fur hat that extended over his ears. He had thick, black framed glasses perched on top of his thick nose. His eyes were green and tired looking. The man looked to be a foreigner, maybe German, and not much older than Winston. He took a seat without introduction.

"We have a meeting." The man said as he removed his hat and his gloves. His hair was matted from the hat and somehow darker than Winston's dark brown hair. He began to slouch and stare at Winston. Winston had an urge to mess with this guy.

"Whoa, meeting?" He smirked in a way that felt devious and knowing. "I think you have the wrong guy, pal."

"Mr. Jones, you have a book I would like to purchase. I do not care where you got it from." Winston's mouth dried up fast. *I don't remember telling him my name.* "I did my homework." The man returned an evil looking smile as Winston sat dumbfounded.

"Of course. Here's the book." Winston withdrew it from his bag and slide it across the table. The man gripped it tightly and opened it. He seemed to stop breathing as he flipped through the pages. "Remarkable isn't it? You can read the glyphs!"

"Of course you can, but I thought this book was long destroyed."

"So you know what it is?"

"Of course. It's The Record." There was an air of deference as he said the name.

"The Record of what?"

"You've read it." The man kept his face down towards the book. "It is an account of everything. The hardest part--" He turned his face to Winston "--is finding where your string of time goes." Through the glasses, his eyes pierced Winston. The man may not have appeared older than Winston's twenty-five years, but in that instance, he knew this man was trouble.

"I'd like \$200,000 for it." The man held his stare tight. "It's quite rare."

"That's fine." His mouth moved but he betrayed no emotion. "I have a check here. It's all filled out; write whatever you want in it." Without breaking eye contact, the man reached into his coat pocket and produced a folded, blank check. Winston numbly slid the check into his pocket.

"How do I know this check is good?" The man smiled at Winston's question.

"Would you like me to flip to the page in the book?" Winston began to shake his head. He had to leave this shop and get as far away from this man as possible. "Before you go, I'd like to buy us a drink." Winston was attacked by unease. "Please, with what little money I have left?" The man's smile grew.

"Sure. I'll take a Mocha Latte." Winston thought for a second. "To go."

"Sounds delicious." The man stood up. Winston realized he would come up to Winston's chin if they both were standing, like most people tended to do. That realization didn't give Winston any satisfaction or ease. The guy gave him the creeps.

"Here you are, my friend." The man placed the cup emblazoned with the coffee shop's logo on the table. Winston picked it up to go for a drink. "Wait, we toast." He held his cup towards Winston.

"What are we toasting?" *I just made out like a bandit off a stolen old book. What are you toasting to, psycho?*

"To our chance meeting. May the rest of our days be filled with good fortune." Winston shrugged and hit the man's cup with his drink. They both took a big sip. The taste surprised Winston.

"A bit sweeter than usual." Winston began to chew on a piece of what he assumed chocolate from the cup. "What's in it?"

"Oh, the usual." The man sipped big. Winston joined in, trying to place that strange taste. "I did add a shot of chocolate." The man smirked.

"It's good." Winston sipped again. He felt an itching in his throat. He coughed and attempted to clear his throat. It was no good.

“Oh, and peanut dust.” He chuckled. “It’s my mother’s recipe. It enhances the flavor.”

Winston’s eyes went wide as he placed the taste: it was the salt from ground peanuts. The itching in his throat was his throat closing. Winston slammed the cup down. He immediately went for the syringe of epinephrine in his coat pocket. He could feel his throat closing fast now. He felt a hand grab his wrist. He stared wide-eyed at the man who met him for his book.

“Are you okay?” There was a slight smirk between his panicked screams. Winston realized somehow this man knew he was highly allergic to peanuts. Now, he was holding his hand from delivering the adrenaline to stop the anaphylaxis. Panic made him breathe harder.

“Help! This man isn’t breathing!” The man pushed forward and slammed Winston to the ground, pressing hard on Winston’s diaphragm. The small space still in his throat allowed a lot of air to escape. Winston’s vision began to pop with white stars. He could hear the stranger screaming for help while holding his hand down tightly. Winston heard someone screaming that an ambulance was coming. He saw the man smile as his vision faded. He knew this was the end.

Michael pushed himself off the thief and checked his pulse. His fingers were unanswered. *Dead like a rat.* Michael smiled to himself but immediately put on a panicked face as the ambulance was screaming down the street.

“What happened to him?” Someone next to Michael asked.

“I don’t know. He started coughing as he was leaving and then he grabbed his chest.” *Another loose end is now removed.* Michael straightened himself as the EMTs entered the coffee house. He gathered The Record and joined the evacuating crowd. As soon as he was safe outside the shop, he made his escape.

The Record was in his possession. This improvised plan had enraged his master greatly. When Michael checked on the old man who possessed the Record for years, he was disappointed to find the book stolen. It took him days to track down the thief. The modern world's conveniences were more of a hindrance to Michael. After finding the thief, and learning of his deathly allergy, he set the trap.

Resurrection had been tough on his ancient master, but this development would satisfy him. The plan for which both Michael and his master needed immortality would finally be initiated. With the book in hand, Michael returned to the long dead Aleister Crowley.