

Nightmare #2

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The squeaking of a rusted pulley, accompanied by the pressure of his widening jaws, awakened Paul to Nightmare #2.

He opened his nightmare eyes to the wet popping sound of dislocating joints. He saw the demon release the handwheel and kneel down to test the tension on the steel wires that ran from his jawbone and teeth up to the skeleton's spine hanging from the chandelier above the bed. Through tears of pain, Paul watched the demon pluck a steel string on the makeshift harpsichord and smile wickedly at him as a sound that can only come from a nightmare mind filled the concert hall, resonating through Paul's tightly gripped skull.

With nary a ripple, the sound of the harp ceased once meeting the surface of the grinning demon's eyes.

Another demon, smaller than the tuning demon, scurried across the ceiling to make minute adjustments to the spine. Paul listened to lead crystals clink against one another as the chandelier tilted under the demon's weight. He felt his head being pulled tight against the nail-studded harness, which cut deeper into his forehead as the hanging demon and tuning demon continued to fine-tune their harp. The audience waited impatiently and occasionally nipped at one another as they sat in bleachers made of bone surrounding the bed.

In one corner of the granite room sat a pristine and gleaming Wurlitzer jukebox with blood bubbling and churning through its shiny glass tubing. Behind the glass cover protecting the turntable and needle mechanism, a human hand held a vinyl record, awaiting the demon conductor who paced back and forth in a small hole carved in the granite floor beneath the bed. The Conductor's Hole, a noble and grand darkness occupied by demons of only the highest musical genius.

Paul's bed lifted from the floor several times, registering the demon conductor's agitated intent to perform. The audience began clicking and scraping their black talons along the granite, signifying their growing lust for performance as the tuning demons nervously adjusted the steel wires once again.

Paul watched the hanging demon move two steel wires over to another vertebrae, blood from his harnessed forehead poured into his eyes, blurring his vision as the tuning continued and the tightening increased. The tuning demon bent forward and licked the blood away so that Paul could continue to witness the demon-tuning and fuel its tonal balance with adequate fear.

The audience clawed, the audience roared.

Paul wanted to scream, but the demon conductor beneath the bed held fast to his spine with sharp claws piercing the mattress, controlling his body, controlling his mind. The demon conductor would decide when Paul would scream.

The genius of music knew its instrument well.

With the steel wires tuned and taunt, the demon tuners moved quickly to the sides of the bed and knelt before their master at eye level, beckoning it to come forth and perform.

The audience fell silent as the first black arm appeared. Claws dug deep into the oak frame of the bed as the demon conductor pulled itself out from its cherished hole. In the conductor's right hand, it held a bone staff with razors criss-crossing the tip. It raised the staff above its head and slowly turned in a full circle, paying due respect to its audience. Then it pointed at the jukebox with one black claw, and the human hand slowly lowered the record and positioned the needle.

The concert began.

The conductor played its instrument in unison with the human recording of "It's A Small World After All." Paul's musical screams enchanted the enthralled audience, enticed by the conductor's perfect plectra of pain. With a sharp claw, the conductor dug deep into Paul's intestines to achieve desired pitch as it strummed the harpsichord with precise note-for-note demonic perfection. Changing pain balance with an occasional brush of the staff across face, chest and groin, the conductor and Paul left the audience wanting more as the record began skipping at its vinyl end.

With the sounds of scratching, popping vinyl and moans of human agony filling the concert hall, the conductor decided to give its audience an encore. It motioned to the jukebox and, standing patiently by the bed as the hand flipped the record over, waited to perform Nightmare #1 again before the instrument expired.

The audience clawed, the audience roared.

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