

# THE MESSENGER

## Author's Note

For the best experience:  
Read this story in dim lighting.  
If possible, play an ambient soundtrack of wind, distant whispers, or slow drones.  
Prepare to question what is real.  
Blood stains these pages, and words bleed beyond the ink.  
Not everything here can be trusted or understood. The message is fractured...  
like the mind that carries it.

## *Return*

We remember the ones who remember us.

Not all who read are ready.  
Not all who finish are free.

There was a boy once. He came close.  
Closer than most.

But names are threads, and his has unravelled.

You are not him.  
You are not different.

The ink knows the shape of your mind.  
It moves in ways you do not yet see.

Turn the pages, if you must.  
Trace the path.

But if you seek meaning,  
hold us to the glass.

And when the black reaches you,  
when the end comes again,

remember:  
You asked for this.  
You let us in.

Thank you, messenger.

## *Veil of Doubt*

Present day, on the edge of the village, beneath the corneferius tree.

I've always feared silence more than sound.

I ran across the path to the village, my legs still aching from kicking around stones with the boys that morning. Pebbles crunched beneath my feet, cold air biting my cheeks, and somewhere distant, a lone owl called. Yet, I had an urge to stop. To open the scroll lying in my hands. Before I realised it, I had stopped beneath a corneferius tree, its bark braided with pale roots, like tendons. The scroll was cool and heavy in my hands, its surface whispering faint crackles like dried leaves brushing one another. The blackness drank light and thought alike, a mercy that erased pain by forgetting, yet held a hunger that never slept.

*Such an object... it shouldn't exist.*

I unfurled the scroll gently. It resisted me at first. Just for a moment. Like it knew I would try. Such an object should not be hurt. I shouldn't have unwrapped it; not here, not alone. But my hands moved nonetheless. As I looked, the black canvas lay cold and silent beneath my fingers; no words decorated its papyrus. My right eye twitched.

*NO. NO. How could this be...? When the man showed it, it was filled with words and symbols. Such beautiful symbols. I could still remember how they drew in my gaze, grasped it and refused to let go. The feeling... It was euphoric. But now, it was empty. He handed it to me under the bridge. His smile was too wide, like it had torn him open. "Take it," he said. "It already chose you."*

In desperation, I turned the scroll, hoping that I had only been looking on the wrong side. This side felt... emptier. Not just blank, but hollow.

*Wait... How could it feel more blank? There's something off about this.*

I raised the scroll. Its edge brushed my lip, cold as riverstone. I squinted; there must be something, some line, some mark I'd overlooked. But there was only black, nothing else. Not colour. Not ink. Something deeper. Something waiting. The scroll was perfect. No dents, no chips. Just blackness.

*How could a colour be so beautiful? I couldn't tear my eyes away from it. How did people say they were happy when they hadn't seen black? Black, more than a void, a mercy. A silence that doesn't remember.*

*My mother...? She told me something. No, she sent me. Somewhere. But...I can't remember what.*

I tried to remember, but the black... it didn't let go.

*Why remember such things... when you have this black? The black that warms. The black that watches... and waits.*

It filled the hollows behind my eyes, etched into the back of my lids.

*I should look away. I knew that. But the black... it hummed, not just with silence, but with promise. Why would I want to see anything else?*

*Black was no mere colour; it was the hush after the storm, the space where memories vanish and promises dissolve.*

THWACK

I flew back, vision torn away from the black scroll, my eyes out of focus. My spine struck the wood with a thud, breath fled like a coward.

I tasted ink. Thick, warm. Not blood.

"Give me the scroll. Give me... GIVE IT," the hand struck me across the face. I slammed into the dirt floor. "Not brown... only black," I murmured. The blackness spread over me, a cold weight that pressed against my skin, silencing the sounds around me until all that remained was a deep, swallowing quiet. But this was a different black. It took me away. It took everything away. Nothing was left.

---

Something dragged me up from the depths. Not a hand, but a scent. Roses? I opened my eyes. Then, colour. Waking me from the darkness that had previously consumed me.

*What had happened?*

I couldn't remember. Yet somehow, I felt as if a part of me was missing. Like something that was supposed to be there suddenly disappeared. As my mind started to process the colours and turn them into images, I saw a feminine face looming over me. Her pale face and her pursed lips looked down in an expression of something that could be mistaken for concern. Yet I knew. This woman was incapable of such feelings. She was my mother after all.

"What did you think you were doing?" The voice rumbled through me, making my head ache.

"You said you'd get the fruits and be back by 10. Not only did I have to go out and find you at midnight, but you didn't even get the fruits. Not a single one." Her expression changed from anger to one of disappointment. "I should've known better than to trust you with such a task."

A pale, tight-skinned monster appeared, replacing the figure of my mother, yet it disappeared before I could examine it more closely.

"And what was the black scroll you were holding? A strange man offered 10 gold coins for it, and we need all the coin we can get. Not that you're any better than your father. He ran. You just get caught." Her voice was a bitter syrup, dripping slow and heavy, coating my mind with cold regret.

"No..." was all I could say. "The black..."

"Shut up, boy, don't you dare speak a word. Especially after failing to steal the fruits from Ol' Jenkins' farm. That old bastard's got fruit rotting in piles, but touch one and he calls the sheriff. He'll be gone soon enough anyway. Then we'll be feasting like kings. That's how this world works; wait for someone to rot, then take what's left," my mother droned on. The words were too much for my weakened state to handle. The words swallowed me, each one sending me deeper into the darkness from which I had recently emerged. I fell deeper and deeper, until I fell into its pits once again.

---

The next few days went by as normal. I played with my friends, went to school, threw sharp rocks at passing strangers and broke rules that seemed to make no sense at all. Yet, the feeling that something was missing didn't disappear.

Rather, it grew. It grew and it grew, a hole forming in me. Yet that hole was black. Pure black. The black I so desired. It would be so easy to give in to the black...

*NO! What am I thinking?* I shook my head and continued the game of soccer, resuming my position as goalkeeper, just in time to save the ball.. My body still remembered what my mind had lost.

On Thursday, no one left their homes. The windows all showed the same flame. One, then two, then none.

---

Several days later...

I walk through the village, weaving in between thatched and dilapidated houses on the far side of town. The abandoned side. The side that we've been told not to go to, ever since we were old enough to understand. The trodden path crunches beneath my feet as I look around in awe.

Since that day... when the black was there; since the time when a part of my soul had disappeared, I found myself being drawn more and more to this place. Something about this place called me. It drew me in. Voices whispered inside my head, beckoning me forth. Some days the voices were loud and noisy, other times they were quiet. Yet always, they had said the same thing. Go west. And here I was, at the western side of the town.

As I walked through the broken wood of collapsed houses, the scent of torn families lingered – a mix of burnt wood, stale sweat, and forgotten tears hanging like dust in the stagnant air – my eyes spotted something... Something kind of black. "It didn't stand out. Not really. Just... black. Like everything else here. Yet it called to me. Whispered like it always had.

He should have walked away. He even tried. But his legs moved before he could stop them.

His fingers, traitors, brushed aside the mud. Cold met skin. His breath caught.

*He looked at the scroll. He? No... that was me.*

And as I took it, I felt... peace. Like returning to something I'd never truly left.

The silence... it was waiting for me.

## *Fractured Mind*

### **Author's Note:**

**Certain words and voices may appear different, like whispers caught in shadows, or shapes flickering at the edges of your vision.**

**This is no accident. Listen closely, and you might hear the scroll's breath between the lines.**

The eyes are the gateway to the mind.

*Wait, no. That doesn't sound right.*

The eyes are the gateway to the soul.

*What is a mind,  
without a soul?*

The scroll had me in its grasp. But it wasn't tight. It was loose enough for me to wriggle and squirm, yet not tight enough to squeeze my soul out. It most definitely could. The power... I could feel it. The whispers were gone, but something else took their place. A presence. A being.

*No, not a being.*

An entity.

*Yes, that's it.*

It was watching me. Stalking me. But was it really so bad? It brought a sense of comfort, a sense of peace; security. I was in another place. Another world. I wanted to stay, but I couldn't. The presence forced me out, yet with it came temptation. Something in my mind told me that if I did what **it** asked, I could return. A moan escaped my mouth at the thought.

*Eternal peace. No more disturbances. Just black. Only black.*

Colours returned. No black. Just cruel reds and mocking blues. I was back in the old world. The miserable one.

I found my torn-up body lying underneath a tree just outside the village.

*But when did I get here?*

There were letters carved into my thigh. Perfect calligraphy. I couldn't have done that. I slowly stood up, as the world shifted before my eyes. The grass became shattered glass, the dirt turned into smashed planks, and I was back. In the village.

*If I can't trust my eyes, can I even trust myself?*

No, trust only the darkness.

*Yes, that was right, only the darkness was to be trusted.*

I opened the scroll.

There were words,

And symbols.

There was a message.

It didn't make sense.

[illegible]

It made sense.

Once again, the village streets flickered to life.

Something dragged me up from my peace. Not a hand, but a scent. Lavender? I opened my eyes. Then, colour. Waking me from the darkness that had previously consumed me.

*What had happened?*

I couldn't remember. Yet somehow, I felt as if a part of me was missing. Like something that was supposed to be there suddenly disappeared. As my mind started to process the colours and turn them into images, I saw a feminine face looming over me. Her pale face and her pursed lips looked down in an expression of something that could be mistaken for concern. Yet I knew. This woman was incapable of such feelings. She was my mother after all.

"What did you think you were doing?"

Her voice came from too far away, and too close. It echoed, but there were no walls. My head throbbed like it remembered something I hadn't thought of yet.

"You said you'd get the fruits and be back before dusk. Not only did I have to pull you from the soil at midnight, but you didn't even bring a single one. Not a single bite."

A pale, tight-skinned monster flickered into being where my mother's face had been, its eyes empty, its smile too wide, a grotesque mask that twisted her warmth into something cold and cruel. It vanished before I could fully grasp the horror, but its echo lingered deep in my bones. My mother continued like nothing had ever happened.

"And what was that black scroll you were holding? A man with no face offered ten coins for it, and you gave it nothing. We need coin. We need silence. You never bring either."

"Not like your father," she added. "He ran until he stopped existing. You just get caught in the middle."

"No..." was all I could say. "The black..."

"Ol' Jenkins lets fruit rot in piles, but reach for one and he screams like dying wood. He'll be gone soon. Then we'll be feasting on what's left of the world. That's how things are: wait for the rot, then eat what's soft."

I tried to look away, but the words stuck to my skin. They soaked into my thoughts. Her voice didn't stop. Her voice didn't end.

I looked at the wall.

There was a note.

The note was short. Just four words.

My name.



And then: 'Don't trust your black.'

---

*Hadn't this happened before? Or did it happen again?*

---

The next few days went by as normal. I played with my friends, went to school, and threw sharp obsidian rocks at passing strangers who wore hoods, concealing their faces. I tried to look under once.

Nothing was there.

Yet, the feeling that something was missing didn't disappear. Rather, it grew. It grew and it grew, a hole forming in me. Yet that hole was black. Pure black. The black I so desired. It would be so easy to give in to the black...

*Maybe...*

*I should just give in.*

There was a boy at the edge of the street. He looked just like me. His lips were moving...

*He disappeared.*

I shook my head and continued the game of soccer, resuming my position as goalkeeper, just in time to save the ball.

The ball was black.

I moved closer.

It ran.

I ran faster.

---

*Something's wrong...*

*I can't tell what.*

*I am free. I am whole.*

*Black is perfection.*

## *Echoes of Silence*

Did you think turning another page would save you?

---

*The colours, were they back once again? Did they bring me to a new world? Or was it the old one?*

*I opened my eyes. Or did I close them?*

*I was in the streets of the village. Again? Hadn't this happened before? No, this is new.*

*I rise from the brown, lifting into the unseen. I must continue.*

*The message... it must be delivered.*

*I must stop. The ritua—*

*I must continue.*

*I walk, one step after the other. Colours surround me, trapping me. All colour is confinement. Only black is free.*

*The huts decorate the streets, their colours an audience to me. They know what's happening.*

*But do you? You need to—*

*I continue to fulfil my role.*

*A man walks up to me. He opens his mouth.*

Sounds bleed through me.

*It must stop.*

My arm shoots forward, grasping his.

I wrench back,

SNAP

The voice cuts through me. His screams.

*The scream enters my mouth like smoke. It doesn't taste like fear. It tastes like memory.*

A new colour appears

Red.

*A beautiful colour, better than the rest.*

*No.*

The screams stop.

I walk over the body of the man, his mouth still open, his face wearing an expression of pain.

*You see what's happening, don't you? You know what must be done. DO IT.*

I continue once more.

The end is near, but it's still only the beginning.

A crowd of faces forms on the sides of the street.

*It's not real.*

Only black is.

The faces change. Their skin slides off their bones. Yet they still stand, a smile printed onto their faces.

*I tried to warn you. It's too late now.*

---

*Three years earlier, before the black took hold.*

I walked, my friend by my side.

He was skinny, malnourished almost. But he was the best friend one could ask for.

We sat together in the wooden cabin, the dusk bleeding orange through the cracks in the walls.

The hearth crackled. The windows fogged.

Outside, the wind clawed at the trees.

Inside, the candlelight held it back.

“My brother took my doll,” he muttered. His lower lip trembled, eyes wide with injustice.

I leaned in. “Did you hear about my father’s doll?”

He looked up. I grinned. “His brother stole it too. But Father loved that doll, treated it so well, it learned to punch.

One night, it crawled into his brother’s room and socked him in the face.

Ran straight back to Father. No one touched it again.”

“Did that really happen?”

I shrugged. “No, what did you think, idiot?”

He burst out laughing.

It was times like this I wish lasted forever.

“I’ll never leave you,” I said. Even if the dark eats the world.”

“What if the dark isn’t bad? What if it just wants someone to talk to?” came the reply.

But the black is perfect.

And for a second, everything was still.

Then the wind changed.

But the black doesn't talk.

It doesn't need to.

It just takes.

---

The air is still now.

The screams are gone. The colours too.

The scroll waits.

I don't know when I came back here. Back to my room. Or what's left of it.

There are no walls anymore. Only the scroll. Only the silence.

I kneel.

My hands don't shake. They should.

But it's warm beneath my fingers. Familiar. Like skin. Like home.

It's been waiting for me.

Waiting for me to return.

And now... I'm here.

I dropped the scroll. But in the mirror, I hadn't. I was reading.

I peel the scroll open.

The ink moves.

The same symbols as before.

The ink on the scroll crunched like bone as I read it. The scent of burnt hair hung in the words.

My skin itched where the vowels touched it.

But this time...

This time I understand

The message has been delivered.

## *The Message*

At the end of the spiral...

You have completed the scroll.

That was your first mistake.

The curse now settles in you, quietly, like dust in the lungs. You won't notice at first. But it will grow familiar. It will shape your silences.

You may think it was only a story. But stories are messengers. And this one has delivered itself completely.

The black ink you followed, word by word, has followed you in return.

You have read what was written. Now you are written into it.

But there is a way. A narrow, trembling path backward.

To walk it:

— Read again what you have read. Not as before.

— Read in reverse. Begin from the last echo. Let your eyes unspool what your mind consumed.

You will notice things you missed.

But even that will not suffice.

To see the truth, hold the scroll to a mirror.

Let the black reveal itself in reflection. The scroll does not speak in a single direction.

It remembers in reverse.

If you do this, if you unmake your reading, you may come to understand.

Or you may only bring it further in.

Some who try see not words, but shapes.

Some hear a voice behind the text.

Some never return from the mirror.

But you have begun.

And now the scroll begins with you.