



EARL'S DREAM

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It had been more than a few weeks; Mana Walker had been receiving phone calls from an unknown user. Although a little annoyed, he was highly curious to know who his caller was. Interestingly, the person used to call with unmistakable precision, exactly at 2 am and never talked.

One day, late at night, he was lying on his bed after completing a particularly tiring analysis on global education drop rates. Random thoughts floated through his mind driving him to the verge of sleep. No sooner had his eyelids touched, the phone rang with its usual high pitched ringtone, alerting him of the one sided chat that was about to take place with this "person", that he was convinced had no ability to properly maintain any kind of conversation. The tiny demon kept ringing, until Mana lost all patience and decided to stop the other, whatever it took. He picked the phone up, ready to pour his heart out.

"Okay, listen. I know you're going to keep your mouth shut as always, but please," he started, gritting his teeth at this point to to keep his voice down, "Please, you should know that ordinary people, like me have a regular life instead of answering calls this late. So if you don't mind..."

"Hello, Earl. It's certainly been a long time, hasn't it?"

That name. He hadn't heard it in ages. There was only one person, other than himself who really knew of his middle name. But it was impossible, because

that person was dead. He watched him die right before his very own eyes. He had grown to loathe that name, as it brought an astounding series of panic attacks and horrifying memories. With his breath caught in his throat, he choked out, "Wh-who are you? H-how do you know that name..."

The caller hung up. Cut off again, Mana collapsed on the bed, overwhelmed by the surge of memories. Unwilling to take a walk down that memory lane, he closed his eyes in hopes of forgetting his past.

He dreamt of a peaceful countryside, a lone building surrounded by a vast sea of gold, and a youthful round face with unruly dark locks blocking his view of the evening sky, reaching their hand out, "Don't you think it's late already?" He spoke, a playful tone in his voice, "C'mon we should get back or you can just forget your dinner tonight, Earl." The dream changes, to one filled with terror and blood. He watched as the others were killed, his body still with fear. No sooner had he turned around, he heard a gunshot and saw a body falling before him.

Mana woke up abruptly, with beads of sweat running down his face.

Since that day, it seemed like the calls had stopped. "So, how did that presentation of yours go?" asked Michael Cross, a former senior delinquent Mana met back in his high school days nonetheless became a good friend and companion who would put up with him for ranting about his day without interruption. But it was a miracle though, Cross never asked about

anyone's wellbeing in general, he seemed content simply to listen, or so according to himself he 'just didn't care'.

"You're actually asking that? Well, not that I don't appreciate it or anything," Mana quickly added, noticing the other's glare, "But it was good. Thanks for asking."

"Hmm...", Cross muttered, as he rubbed his scruffy beard, "You wanted to say something, else you wouldn't have called," Cross added, relaxing on the park bench he was currently occupying.

"Yeah, I had one, but I don't know how to put it..."

"Course, wake me up from a nice dream with my crush and now you're confused. Make it quick or I'm hitting the road."

"Geez, can't you at least say that nicely?"

Suddenly, there was that head with familiar dark hair, among the swings. Mana chased after it, leaving a confused Cross with his scruffy beard.

Running for what felt like an hour, he reached an abandoned building facing, finally coming face to face with the owner of the head with familiar dark hair. He didn't say anything, rather smiled.

Suddenly his world was engulfed in darkness. Mana woke up, realising it was all just a dream, and that neither the 'Earl' nor the person actually existed.

"He didn't say anything, rather smiled."

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