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The Price

Mark P. Biciunas

Gettysburg College, bicima01@cnav.gettysburg.edu

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Author Bio

Mark Biciunas is a sophomore, majoring in English with a Writing Concentration. He works as a staff writer for The Gettysburgian in the entertainment section, writing reviews for films and events. He works on CAB and for Habitat for Humanity.

Mark Biciunas

The Price

"I try to remember my mother. I really do. But every time I close me eyes, I can't see anything! It hurts so much! But I don't know why!"

The bartender just looked on in utter shock at his last patron of the night. He really didn't know what to say to him.

"Look, buddy, I got no say in psycho stuff like this. But I can say that you've had enough. You want me to call a cab?"

Martin pushed back from the bar and turned.

"Nah, I can let myself out. But thanks anyway."

"Do you know where you're going?" The bartender asked.

Martin fell silent for a minute. He stood there with his eyes focused on a mirror. His face captivated him. He had never seen this face before. The bartender put down the glass he was cleaning and arched an eyebrow. Then Martin put his hand on his face and breathed in. He turned to the bartender with a smile.

"No." Then he pushed open the door and left.

Martin was alone as he walked through the streets of Boston late at night. He walked with a hunched back to deal with the cold. He knew he had walked these streets before, but he couldn't see them. Every street sign was new to him. Every building looked the same to him. He made his way through the winding streets until he came upon the Boston Commons. There he found a bench to sit after so long. He sat and watched what few people there were walk by. He just stared as they paid him no mind. Martin looked into the shadows of his mind to try to see something. There wasn't even a blur, no covered faces, not even a goddamn name. Martin wasn't even his name. Waking up in the alley next to the bar was the first thing he could remember. Some people walked by, and one of the girls saw him there.

"Martin is that you? Where have you been?" She ran to him enthusiastically, but stopped short of touching him. Suddenly she her face became embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry, you look like my friend Martin. But, you have black hair. He has blonde. Why am I telling you this? You don't care." She turned to return to her friends. She left Martin confused, mouthing the name "Martin" over and over. He stumbled through the doors of the bar and sat down. The bartender turned to his newest patron and asked him his name.

"Martin," he replied.

Martin began sweating the harder he tried to remember. It was like something was blocking him and the more he tried to push against it, the more it pushed back. He opened his eyes to stop the pain. But the pain continued. He was crying, but he didn't know why. Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder and spun around. A cop was standing there in the shadows. Martin jumped from the bench to his feet.

"You alright son? You're shaking. Anything wrong?"

"N... no, nothings wrong. I'm j...j...just a little rattled right now. I can't remember m...my mother."

The tears started to flow even more. The cop cocked his head at this. He didn't know what he could do. Either case, he put his left hand on his holster.

"Hey, it's alright. Just take a deep breath. Let me help you."

Martin's eyes went wide when he heard the cop. Something in his head became clear. No faces, but those words. Let me help you. They rang out like a shot in the dark. Could he have had something to do with his memory loss? Was he trying to take him back? No, not again. He already lost his memory, he won't lose anything else.

"You stay away. Not again. I won't let you take me."

The cop was at a loss. He didn't know what he did to set this man off. But he wasn't going to let this escalate any further.

"Hey, it's alright. I'm here to help. There is no reason to freak out. Just sit back down."

"No! I won't let you take me! Stay the fuck away!"

Then Martin took off into the Commons, slowly disappearing into the darkness. The cop pulled out his receiver.

"Hey control, I got a seriously disturbed man making his way through the Commons. I'm gonna try to follow him and apprehend him."

A crackled voice came through, "Do you need any assistance?"

"No, he's no threat now, but he could be. Says he doesn't remember his mother. Like I said, disturbed."

There was no response for a moment, then, "Understood."

Martin was falling over every rock and root that got in his way. His tears were flowing even more freely now. Who was this man? What did he do? Questions kept filling up his mind as he flailed around in the darkness. He stopped next to a large tree to catch his breath. He wanted so much to remember something. Something else that could help him. He covered his face to stop the crying. And in the silence, he heard something. Footsteps. Footsteps that were getting closer. Martin crouched down next to the tree with his hands over his mouth. The cop had followed him here.

"He must know something," Martin thought to himself. "That's the reason he's following me. The reason he's looking for me. God, don't let him catch me." The tears ran like a river now.

The cop was lost in the darkness. He had no idea where this man had gone. But he would find him. He won't let such a disturbed man run free. Then he heard something. A rustling to his right. He pulled his gun from its holster and walked slowly to the tree. Sweat ran down his face. He put his back to the tree and waited. He needed to hear something. But his impulse to catch this man took over. He spun around the tree to find nothing. He let out a sigh and lowered his gun. Then he heard something above him. Before he could raise his gun, Martin was on top of him. The cop fell to the ground as he tried to fight off Martin. He felt Martin's flailing hands smack him as he tried in vain to take out the cop. The cop kicked off Martin and stood up. Martin was curled up away from the cop, holding his stomach. The cop, without realizing it, walked to check the man. He stood over him. Then there was a flash.

The cop lay a few feet away from Martin. He was convulsing while holding his chest. Martin sat in total shock at what had happened. When the cop towered over him, Martin had only one option. He shot the cop. In the tussle, Martin had taken the cops gun before he was kicked off. Martin was shaking, looking at his hands. But it wasn't because of blood that now covered them. It was the flash. In the split second that the gun went off, an illuminating light filled the area. And he saw it. His face. A face taken by shock and pain but Martin's face nonetheless. What was going on? Who are these people? Thoughts ran around in his head. Was he seeing things because of his amnesia? Or was he a part of some crazed scientist's experiment? Martin lost control and threw up. He was spinning. All he could see in his head was his face, the blood, and those words: "Let me help you."

"What's going on!?" He screamed to the darkness. Then suddenly, he felt something. He put his hand on his neck. He felt a long, cold, tube. Then further up was a hand. But he had no time to think. All the thoughts that worried him, just seemed to go away. What little he could see turned to blurs. Then darkness took him.

Some time later, Martin awoke in a bright room. He covered his eyes with his hand. After a few minutes, he could see. An empty room. An empty white room. He stood up.

"Hello! Is anyone there? Please, I beg of you, tell me what going on! God! Somebody help me! I just want to know what's going on!"

Suddenly the wall next to him began to lift, filling the room with a blinding blue light. Martin felt himself be consumed by an intense chill. He wrapped his arms around himself and moved towards the opening. It was like walking into the aftermath of a flash-freeze, with everything in the room covered by ice. Metal wires lined the room from ceiling to floor. He followed the one closest to him, which lead to a large glass tube. He rubbed away the frost that covered the glass. Inside was a woman.

She looked as though she was no more than 25 years old. Martin was speechless, but he moved to the next, which also had a woman, this woman being many years older. Martin stopped and spun around; the room was lined with these tubes. There had to be at least a dozen, and each one went back three tubes. Suddenly Martin became aware, and he ran around the room, rubbing off the frost from each casing; until he came to one marked subject two. There, in the front tube, rested himself, resting peacefully in suspended animation. The realization overwhelmed Martin causing him to vomit. As he tried to compose himself, someone else entered the room. He was at least 6'4", wearing an expensive Armani suit. Without even acknowledging Martin, he walked up to the cryotubes and put his hand on it. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply the cold air. Then, he spoke.

"You can't remember your mother, can you?" He turned and looked down at Martin, who was stunned that he knew he could not remember.

"You're not alone. Every time we test a new subject, the first thing they realize is that they cannot remember their mother. We still don't understand why. But over time we will be able to wipe that as well."

Martin looked on in horror as this man spoke with such clarity about the men and women surrounding them.

"Subject two-beta, you caused quite a problem for us. You were not scheduled for any type of active testing for quite some time. You have thrown us off our calculations and now we have some maintenance to deal with."

Martin had stopped listening to the man. The only thing he could think about was what the man had called him. Subject two-beta.

"My...my name is Martin."

The man looked at Martin with slight amazement in his eyes. He then began to laugh. A type of laugh that hurt Martin. A laugh of disbelief and humiliation. After a moment, the man composed himself and looked at Martin.

"Your name is Martin? My God, that truly is amazing. You actually have cognitive thought. Well, I was aware you had some ability to think when you killed Two-Gamma. But to think you have enough of a brain to hold onto a concept like a name. You were an excellent specimen for the project."

"Project?" Martin asked tentatively.

"I guess there's no harm in telling you. We are a branch of the government trying to create the perfect human. Trying to improve upon the design given to us by God. To make his design better. To make people immune to diseases, able to live longer, survive anything."

"S...So you have been abducting people and running tests on them without them knowing? That's terrible."

"You continue to amaze me. If I wasn't so sure of it, I would think you were real."

"I am real! I...I think, therefore I am!"

This statement greatly disturbed the man. He lifted his hand and began to rub his beard as he was thinking.

"Subject two-alpha was a philosophy professor at Boston College. The top of his field and respected by all. He would have known that phrase by Descartes. Some of his memories must have transferred over to you during the cloning. Even though we wiped both yours and Gamma's minds. Truly amazing that you are recalling that. Gamma showed no recollection of anything before we reconstructed his brain. He was sent into the world as a regular man but with a perfect immune system. We tested him against thousands of strands of different viruses. We would have had all our data, before you were released and killed Delta. Now we have to restart that whole process."

"How can you talk like that? You speak as though we are nothing to you. How can you be so calm about the loss of life?"

"Throughout the years, many lives have been lost in the pursuit of science. What are a few more in the pursuit of immortality? Your 'lives' mean nothing to me. I have my eyes focused on my goal and if I lose a few clones here and there, I won't shed any tears. But you have shown me something today. You have shown me how fast the mind can grow when placed in a new environment with no prior knowledge. So, I guess, in a way, you have done something for us. And I thank you for that."

Martin stared at this man with tearing eyes. He could not grasp the cold reality of his existence. That he, and so many others, were being manipulated like marionettes. He needed to do something, anything. Martin charged the man, hoping to catch him off guard. Martin's charge was met with a fist to the stomach. Martin fell to his knees trying to breathe. The man watched him. He knelt down in front of Martin and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry it had to come to this. But I don't care what you think. I don't care what anyone thinks. Immortality is worth any price. And soon everyone will see me for the god I am. And they will cheer and praise me."

With that the man shot Martin in the chest. Pain rushed throughout Martin's body. He felt around the entry wound, watching as the blood came flooding out of his chest. He looked up at the man as he realigned his tie. Martin tried to say something, but he had no energy left to do anything. He just watched as everything began to blur, then fade, and then everything just drifted into darkness.

His head slumped down and his arms fell to his side. The man stood for a few moments more to make sure nothing happened. When he was satisfied that Martin was dead, he turned to leave the cryo-chamber. He walked past the door and turned for one last look. Seeing Martin

slumped there, slowly freezing in the cold, gave the man a chill. But he shook that away, content with the fact that the day's mishap had been resolved. The door slid shut, leaving the subjects to remain in suspended animation until they were needed.

Hours later, the man returned to deal with Martin's body. When he entered the room, he stood shocked at the sight before him. Or rather what wasn't before him. Martin's body was gone. He swiftly walked over to the bloodstain on the floor. *A body can't just get up and walk away.* He looked around the room, and there, on Subject three-alpha's cryotube, was something written in blood. "Survive anything." The man stood aghast, but looked closer to something written above it. "Stand tall and be praised." Then, three-alpha's eyes sprung to life. Her eyes darted around the room in panic. The man looked around as more eyes began to open. Each pair of eyes darted around until settling on him. Without hesitation, he made a dash for the door. But he stopped short. There in the door stood Martin. He was covered in frozen blood. But it was the smile that disturbed the man. The man didn't know what to do; he just stood there, frozen. Martin's lips cracked as he opened them.

"Worth any price? Even God knows when to stop." With that the doors slid shut; leaving the man surrounded by those he deemed expendable. He ran to the door, slamming his fists against the metal. The sound reverberated throughout the chamber. When he had lost feeling in his hands, he turned to face the men and women whose lives were destroyed by him. He pulled his gun and pulled the trigger. But the gun had frozen, leaving him completely defenseless. He dropped the gun and fell to his knees. They took no pity on him. They dragged him, kicking and screaming to the last cryotube in the room and shoved him inside. He screamed.

"No! Don't do this to me! Don't you realize that what I was doing was for the betterment of mankind? You could bring about a new world."

"O brave new world that has such people in it. Let's start at once." The voice came from the back. Up walked Two-Alpha, with a face of such discontent. He stood over the man. He leaned in close, nearly touching his face with his own.

"It will be a new world. You just won't be leading us there."

Two-Alpha pressed down on the panel and the door began to shut. The man began to scream as everyone looked on. The hatch closed and sealed shut. The man placed his hands on the hatch, trying in vain to push it open. Then, in a flash, he was frozen. His eyes still open; his mouth gaping wide, trying to scream. The people left the door to leave. One by one, they left the chamber as they left him in the cold darkness of his own design.