

The Story Of You

It was a rainy night in Manchester, England. Charles was making his way back to his flat, after a long shift at the manufacturing factory he worked in.

The gloomy weather made him feel even more lonely.

Charles's dad had never stuck around, and he was never a social butterfly at school. After his mom died last year, he had to work for his own living. He never got the chance to go to college. Charles was shivering as he walked the wet sidewalk, with no umbrella, and an old man must have noticed this.

"Hey! You there! You look cold. Oh, what a silly thing to say, of course you're cold. Come in! We can have a cup of hot cocoa together."

Charles turned to look at the man at the entrance of the rusty shop. It was an old, vintage looking shop. He had never really seen it before, but it gave him the creeps.

Maybe, if Charles had more friends, he would've been warned to stay away from that place. Maybe, he would've made the right decision.

"I've really got to get home, sir! But thank you for the offer." Charles smiled at the man.

"Rubbish! Your flat's still a while away. At least warm up, and wait for the storm to subside."

Charles hesitated. A warm cup of hot cocoa and an actual conversation, something he had not had with anyone for a while, did sound good...

"Alright."

He walked into the dusty, cramped store.

"Nice place you got here."

He stared at the odd-looking gadgets and gizmos scattered around the shop.

"Oh, don't mind those, just some of my collection."

...collection of what, exactly? But Charles didn't say anything, because he didn't want to be rude. After all, the kindly old man had been so welcoming.

As he followed the man, he bumped into a shelf, with a beat up doll slumped down on it. The shelf shook as he crashed into it, and the doll fell off, straight into his hands.

The doll had beady, black eyes, and a distorted "v" shaped mouth. It was a scary image, one that he knew he'd have trouble getting out of his head. He quickly placed the doll back on the shelf.

"Sorry-"

"Oh, don't worry about it."

The man smiled widely at Charles. Charles staggered back slightly. For a second, he thought he saw the doll's smile in the man's face. But he must have just been imagining things.

"We can sit back here. I don't bring many people to the back of the store Charles, but I feel like I can trust you."

The man pulls out two seats, and plops down on one of them.

Charles had a sudden urge to leave.

"What are you standing there for? Sit!"

Charles sits.

The man watches him for a few seconds. It seems like hours to Charles. Then he sighs, and smiles. "You know, I was real unpopular when I was in school. My parents left the picture too. I didn't have anyone, really. But now I do. I have my store. You probably think these little things are strange, creepy. But they're my best friends."

Charles smiles awkwardly. His eyes pass over a jack in the box. The headless figure inside juts out, but even with no eyes, it seems to be staring at him.

"I think we're very alike, Charles."

Charles brings his eyes back to the man, startled.

How does he know my name? I swear I didn't tell him.

The man laughs.

“Sorry, your name is on your ID, Charles.”

Right, my work ID.

“Oh... well it was nice talking to you sir, but I really should be going-”

“Oh, I was just getting the biscuits and the hot cocoa’s ready! You wait right there, don’t let an old man’s hard work go to waste.” He staggers out of his chair and hobbles away.

Charles gets up reluctantly, and looks around the room. He gets freaked out looking at the things in the store for more than a few seconds, how does the old man *live* with them?

He seems a bit bonkers...

An abnormally thick book catches Charles’s eye. He loves reading. It was one of the only things he enjoyed as a child, but he hasn’t got to do much of it lately. Plus, what could be so dangerous about a book?

For old time’s sake...

Charles reads the title. *The Story Of You.*

Huh?

He flips through the pages of miniscule words, furrowing his eyebrows as he reads further,

‘ He had never really seen it before, but it gave him the creeps. Maybe, if Charles had more friends, he would’ve been warned to stay away from that place. Maybe, he would’ve made the right decision.’

Startled, Charles drops the book.

What in the world...? He’s panting heavily. What is this? Some sort of unbelievable creation?

Why does it have... such a detailed description of my whole life? Up to this point? That man is a crazy stalker!

Charles was confused, and terrified. All he knew was that he needed to get out of here right now. He looked around, and the man was nowhere in sight.

Maybe I’ll just grab this freaky book, figure out what’s happening!

When Charles grabbed the book from the floor, he sees that some new writing had appeared.

“He grabbed the book, thinking he could solve it’s mystery. But this foolish man knows so little, not even that a killer is looming by just a few feet behind him...”

What?

Charles whips around to the old man’s smiling face.

He never got to finish the last sentence of the book.

“And no one around was ever able to pinpoint who that bloodcurdling scream belonged to. Or maybe they were just too afraid of the rumors associated with the run-down store to really try.”