

Vox Visum

by Madeleine Dougherty

Maurice ran down the stairs and away from the voices calling after him. They demanded that he “Stop,” “Wait,” and “Come Back.” He had made a scene in his therapist’s office, so his therapist tried to help by calling in his security to calm him down. It just made Maurice want to escape. He had pushed past the security and the kind secretary that always offered him something to drink. She made these new, specialty teas and brought them for the patients and herself. He had felt a moment of remorse when she fell against her desk, but he had to get away. He had seen something in his therapist’s eyes that he did not want to see again though now he had seen it, it was burned into his memory. He had seen Dr. Robson begin an affair with a male patient that escalated until he raped and killed the patient when he had threatened to tell Dr. Robson’s family. The patient had been a victim of a previous rape and was working to move past the attack. Dr. Robson had a wife and three children that Maurice knew of. He kept pictures of them on his desk and around on his bookshelves. Maurice had seen Dr. Robson work to make the patient’s death look like a suicide. Maurice’s heart clenched at the thought of what would happen to Dr. Robson’s family, but he had not seen the police arresting Dr. Robson.

Maurice burst forth from the office building and onto the busy city sidewalk. He struggled to put his dark, mirrored sunglasses back on, but as he searched his pockets, realized that he had dropped them back in the office in his haste. When he heard the voices call for him again, he pushed forward with renewed speed. He crashed into Jeanne, causing her to spill her groceries, and seeing her take her pain and frustration about her husband beating her out on her

bruised and broken children. Maurice jumped away from helping her and spun around into an elderly man's chest. Looking up several inches to apologize, he saw in Tom's eyes how he raped his granddaughter for years until she killed herself by walking into traffic when she was 12. He jerked away only to fall into another man who grabbed Maurice and turned him to face the man. Maurice saw in Kirk's eyes how Kirk and his friends beat two siblings to death: the girl for being mentally retarded and the boy for being gay.

Maurice pushed at the man, trying to escape the horrible violence that only Maurice could see in his eyes. Kirk would not let go. Maurice swung at him, desperate as he heard the voices get closer. Kirk threw him against the window of a store and began punching him when Maurice screamed out accusations.

"How could you? They had done nothing to you. You beat them only because of your prejudices. You killed them. You're a murderer."

The glass behind Maurice shattered. He fell to the ground when the security pulled Kirk away. Dr. Robson knelt down beside Maurice and wiped some of the glass away.

"It'll be alright, Maurice. You're going to be okay. Whatever you saw wasn't true. I have never harmed any of my patients. I won't hurt you. I'm going to take care of this, take care of you." He patted Maurice on the back. "Why don't we go back to my office and sort this all out?"

Maurice didn't look up at Dr. Robson. He gave no indication that he was paying any attention to the therapist or the security guards keeping the crowd of onlookers and a still angry Kirk back a safe distance. Instead, he was clinging to the wall below the broken window and gazing at his reflection in the glass surrounding him. He stared, wondering at his ability and the painful, horrible knowledge that came with it. He saw the worst moments in people's lives, and

he just wanted it to stop. It was a useless power. No one believed him. He had no way of bringing the criminals to justice. He had no way of saving the victims. They were already dead. He saw the past which he could not change.

He gazed into his own reflection, into his own eyes, and he saw. He saw himself picking up one of the pieces of glass in front of him and jabbing it into his eyes, but finding that the visions, the pain continued within his mind. He cried out. Dr. Robson tried to stop him, but he was too fast. He tried to get Maurice help. He began to call for an ambulance. Before Dr. Robson could grab hold of him, Maurice lurched up. He stumbled through the crowd, off the curb, and into the street. The first car passed just before he stepped into the lane. The second car stopped, but then Maurice walked blindly into the second lane. A box truck going just a little too fast crashed into Maurice. As Dr. Robson and the security ran over to the broken and bloody body, Maurice looked away from his reflection.

“It’s the future. I see the future,” he whispered. Dr. Robson shook his shoulder, trying to wake him up from his dazed expression. Instead of looking up, Maurice picked up the piece of glass, ready to commit to his fate. He saw into his reflection again, and saw another vision, something that had never happened before.

He watched his body lying on the ground be surrounded by a crowd. Beyond that, his gaze was forced into traveling to the opposite sidewalk. There a woman was talking with three men. The men were in sharp, black tailored suits and gazing around as if they were searching everything in their environment. The woman was in jeans, a purple peasant blouse, and a tan, decorative scarf. She was watching the confusion in the middle of the street.

“We’re never going to get the car with this traffic jam,” the tallest, brunette man said.

“Pity. That man was in such torment,” the woman said. One of the men huffed a laugh.

“What?”

“Just your bleeding heart, ma’am. If he were alive, we would have a new pet.”

“Oh, bah. They are not pets. But...he looked quite interesting. He was young, but had gray hair. He was troubled. Why else would he gouge out his eyes? I should have liked to know his story.”

“And then fix him,” the man said with a smirk and raised eyebrow. Her eyes snapped to her bodyguard/friend’s.

“I have never heard you complain on how I “fixed” you.”

“No. I am grateful to you for taking action with my life. I was lost, but now I have a job, friends, a good life. Have I said thank you lately.” He gave her a crooked smile.

“No, not today, you haven’t. I think someone owes me a mochacchino,” the woman said, smiling back at the man. Her smile faded as she looked back at the accident. “Would not others be as grateful for my help? I have not lived this long without learning some truths about people.” The conversation continued, but the sound grew indistinct and the vision grew blurry as Maurice was pulled away.

Maurice was back in his own mind, in the present. Only one thing kept running through his thoughts. He wanted to see, to meet that woman. Her chestnut hair shone like gold in the sun. Her green eyes flashed from concerned to amused to thoughtful and serious. She had a strong jaw and sweet pink lips. Her eyebrows were very expressive as they raised in sarcasm and crunched together in a frown. She wore little, dangling flower earrings that sparkled green and pink. They glittered against her pale skin. Skin that seemed too pale, but that the sun made glow.

He believed without any proof that she would be willing to accept and understand his ability. He put down the piece of glass and sat back against the wall.

“Good, good. That’s good. We’re going to get you the help you need, Maurice.” Dr. Robson turned to one of the guards. “Tell McDravers Hospital that I am bringing in a patient that is likely to do harm to others and do harm to himself. I would recommend a jacket.” He turned back toward Maurice. Maurice was glaring at him. As their eyes met, Maurice witnessed Dr. Robson’s violence again, but this time he saw the police question him several weeks later. Apparently, the good doctor had hidden the body well. The police asked for Dr. Robson’s whereabouts at his male patient’s time of death. The dates they were talking about occurred several months before Maurice’s present time.

This time Maurice was less afraid of his visions. He took a deep breath and continued to glare into Dr. Robson’s scared eyes.

“I see the past, Dr. Robson,” Maurice whispered. The therapist leaned forward to better hear him, but the look in Maurice’s blue orbs made him hesitant to do so. “I see the past. And I see the future. I have seen your past, Dr. Robson. I saw what you did to that man, how you led him on, how you made him believe that you loved him. I saw you rape and kill him out of fear that he would reveal your secrets to your family. Well, I haven’t seen your future, but I am going to guarantee that those police come back to do more than question you. They are going to arrest you. You will go to prison.” Maurice’s voice had been getting louder and louder as he spoke, getting the attention of the guards and the crowd. The one guard that had begun calling the McDravers Mental Hospital hung up and leaned toward his partner.

“Should I call the police?” he said. His partner nodded.

“No one will believe you,” Dr. Robson spat at Maurice. “I am a respectable doctor. No one is going to believe some crazy patient who says he can see the past. You’re a fool, and no one is going to help you.”

“I think I will,” said a smooth, alto voice from above them. Dr. Robson looked up in surprise. Maurice, who recognized the voice, looked up more sedately. They both saw a woman who was standing in front of the sun. Her hair shone like a halo. “Sorry, but I couldn’t help overhearing. My friends call me a bleeding heart. I can’t help myself when someone is in trouble.” She shrugged and gestured casually. A charm bracelet chimed against itself. Her bejeweled fingers sparkled. Her movements turned her hands into birds or fairies that twinkled and jingled.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Dr. Robson said, sneering as he stood.

“Oh, sorry. I’m Elizabeth Prince.” She held out her hand to shake, but her expression quickly turned to pleasure.

“I’m pleased to meet you as well. I was across the street when I saw the commotion. You were in despair. I wanted to see if I could help. It is quite curious to see this change in your mood. Are you okay?”

Maurice looked away, bashful, but turned back with wide eyes and a slight, hopeful smile.

“I am okay now that you are here. My name is Maurice. I was in trouble. You have saved me.”

Elizabeth stepped back, confused, and glanced back at her men. They glared at Maurice warily. He met each of their gazes and saw something different. He saw the smaller, blonde

man, Charles, screaming in horror, covered in blood as he gazed at the pieces of his victim's, his family's, bodies. Then, Maurice saw Charles grasping for the comfort and sympathy within the embrace of Elizabeth. Maurice witnessed the other brunette, Liam, ripping apart the one who made him, then continuing to do the same to those he considered to be food. The vision changed to show him joining Elizabeth's clan and trying to better the lives of homeless teenagers as a part of one of Elizabeth's charities. In the eyes of the second, bigger brunette, the one Elizabeth had known longer and was closer to, Maurice saw Edward struggle with his hunger, again and again, tearing his fangs into the flesh of humans. Eventually, Edward took out his pain and hatred on his own flesh, taking to the forests, little more than an animal. Maurice saw Elizabeth find him, nurse him back to health, and teach him to help and care about others rather than harm, teach him to deal with the hunger. Hundreds of years passed in seconds.

Elizabeth turned back to Maurice. He stepped back, averting his eyes, afraid of what he would see in hers. He heard the tinkling of her bracelet, but still jumped when he felt her soft, cool hand. He could not deny leaning into the hand as it cooled his fevered cheek.

"What did you see?" she asked.

"I see the future and the past, but it's hard to tell the difference. Most of the visions don't have newspapers or calendars handy," he said, still hopeful she would believe him and be able to do something about it.

"You see it in people's eyes. Especially their worst moments," she said, softly. He nodded. "There is nothing I can do about this. I cannot take this ability from you, but I can promise that I both believe you and empathize with the pain and horror you must feel each time you have a vision. You can trust me. Look into my eyes."

Maurice felt as if something were squeezing his heart, but he forced himself to move with the hand that was gently raising his head. He looked into her eyes and he felt. He felt her love for her family so long ago. He felt her fear and then anger at the monster that passed its power on to her. He felt the monster's neck snap between her hands. He felt her hunger grow to where she could not deny it. He felt her fangs, his fangs, slip into skin and the thick gush into his, her mouth. He felt her lips touch countless lovers and felt their hands touch her thighs. He felt rough and soft fabrics, jewels, money, more blood. He felt her feel the evil that resided in others like a tangible being. And he felt her feel the good. He felt her sorrow for the other monsters like her. He felt her pride when they gained, like her, control over themselves. He felt her struggle as business and technology changed to use these new tools to her advantage. He felt her joy at feeling the sun again. He felt her throat, his throat, constrict in apprehension at the taste of a blood substitute, then relax when the taste was no different from the real stuff. He felt her yearning in this new age to reconnect to humanity on a more personal level than just the brief interactions at her company. He felt her love for the new family she had built. He felt her eyebrows scrunch into a frown from the concern she felt for him.

He reached up to gently caress her forehead. She began to smile wryly at him. Edward and the others men relaxed. Maurice took Elizabeth's hand from his cheek.

"Would you like to get a mochacchino with me?" he asked. Elizabeth's smile grew big and bright.

"I would love to," she said. Maurice slipped her hand around his elbow and they began walking down the sidewalk. "And you can tell me how my lawyers can help with this whole

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February 21, 2012

problem,” she said while pointing back where Dr. Robson was trying to convince his guards that Maurice was the one in trouble and not himself. Maurice smiled at Elizabeth.

“That I can do,” he said.