

-The Kiwi King-

Outside the rain hit Division Street like mallets on a Guatemalan marimba, this is how our young Ryan Juhl heard the world “*magical*”. Even though Sleep boogers still lingered in the corner of his eyes he was day dreaming already as he sat at his kitchen table eating a stale pop tart that had been left out from a drunken night before . Ryan worked at the corner store called the KIWI MART and was known by the neighborhood as the kiwi king. He was always open for a conversation about anything from philosophy to farting and the fact that he could remember every one of the regular customers by name earned him this title. Across the street the neighborhood tavern also knew Ryan as the kiwi king and also as the kid they had to carry home some nights after a long night of heavy drinking. Ryan was a poet, or so he thought himself to be one. He stared at his dirty kitchen wall “*all my so called friends*” he thought “*they don't really see me for who I am*”. Ryan desperately wanted to tame his drinking because he knew it as the ice on the surface that must be broken in order for the world to see his true nature.

He would be working a double that day and was not concerned with time but he looked at the clock anyway 7:45 a.m. Ryan had only three short blocks to walk in the drizzling Oregon rain . He slipped on his black canvas shoes, lit a cigarette and headed for the front door.

The bell rang as he entered his mini mart domain. He sighed “I sling cigarettes and shit at a corner store” Ryan thought of himself as anything but special, he gazed at his kingdom of junk food, energy drinks, cheap beer and cigarettes. He opened up as usual and rested his head on his hand, elbows on the counter as if a bored child studying a painting he could not quite understand. Without thinking he grabbed a busted newspaper. From habit Ryan scanned each mug shot trying not to judge anyone because he knew that one day he would surely find his own picture inside too.

The doorbell rang and Ryan did not even look up, while scanning the faces of meth that resembled trolls, orks and could have been prom queens the strangest thought popped into Ryan's head as freshly as the pop tart had from the drunken night before “*I know what my own thoughts sound like*” pssh Ryan continued “ of course I know what my own thoughts sound like” he said sarcastically under

his breath thinking it weird as if he had to confirm his own thought. Before he could return his gaze to the busted newspaper he found himself staring into the eyes of a stout man with thick black hair and wood rimmed glasses waiting at the counter ready to purchase an energy drink and a pack of gum the man asked Ryan for some cigarettes as he added “ that’s funny what you said before” as he pulled cash from his wallet “ I was thinking something like that” the man explained. “Well that I know what my own thoughts sound like because when I came into the store I was blank I knew exactly what I wanted but these damn advertisements made me want some gum to keep my breath fresh and clean” the man paid for his cigarettes energy drink, gum and left. Ryan didn’t know what to think of this last transaction but was used to all sorts of weird shit at the Kiwi mart and did not give it a second thought. He checked the time and went back to reading his junk news.

Hours passed and the day melted into a puddle of strange transactions. Ryan felt he was on a roll, guessing people’s names and birthdays. Giving people advice on life which he didn’t even really understand himself. It all seemed as if it was coming from nowhere, like he was reading horoscopes from the newspaper out of thin air. The day passed more quickly than it had ever before. He heard the door open and close a thousand times as ideas flooded his mind he stared at the door “*is the convenience store door a portal to my mind’s eye?*”. Ryan went back to his junk news and stared at the attractive girls who had been arrested for drunk driving or shoplifting. He heard the annoying door bell ring as it always had when another human being entered the store, from habit Ryan glanced up at the customer and waved. He recognized the man and went back to doing his normal job daydreaming and not paying attention to much of anything. “*Micro or cheap? Maybe wine, damn it do I really need to impress her? I mean we just went out I just want to relax!*” this thought came to Ryan suddenly and was as clear as vodka and again Ryan said exactly what was on his mind and without any hesitation shouted “fucking Rainer of course” he never the type to keep what he was thinking to himself.

The man standing in front of the beer refrigerator stared at Ryan for a moment frowned satisfied and with less hesitation than Ryan would have; he grabbed a six pack of Rainier beer. “thanks dude I was feeling a bit overwhelmed” the man said as he set down his beer. “No problem”

Ryan said as he further explained that he had been having strange thoughts all day and that he suddenly began to think about what type alcohol to buy as if he was on a date or something. Ryan stopped before he could finish when he took notice to the man's facial expression who said "I was thinking like that exactly same thing". Ryan didn't have time to respond because the man paid and left.

He was with his own thoughts "*this shit's been happening to me all day*". Ryan Inhaled deeply and exhaled and looked over his small corner store kingdom. Right then it occurred to Ryan that maybe all these coincidences meant something or that maybe he had reached what some of the old timers called singularity when you and the store become one.. Butch the manager who had been with the store since the doors had opened had said it only happens to some and it happens in different ways. Ryan realized that is this is what he had finally attained "one with the store" he said and smiled

The doorbell rang and a regular know by the neighborhood as Samuel walked into the store and the first thing Ryan thought as clear as gin and soda bubbled in his head "*MALT LIQUOR*" Ryan stopped Samuel "wait" Ryan commanded "I know exactly what you need buddy" Ryan walked over to the Beer and grabbed a 40oz of the finest malt liquor Samuel dropped a five on the counter and left. Ryan accepted the two dollars and twenty cents extra as a tip. "I can hear peoples thoughts" he state with regal authority "*maybe*" he thought "*I can rob this joint, or I could rob the customers, I could open my own store call it mind mart and wear one of those funny psychic hats 'n' shit roll knee deep in MoNEY !*" Ryan paused and look around. He was unsure if he had thought these things or said them aloud. Ryan was running ideas of exploiting this sudden extra sensory possession superpower through his mind and he was getting very excited and was still day dreaming when the door violently opened "*here again what the fuck am I doing here*" a young man no more younger than Ryan in a grey hoodie moved through the store like a torpedo. Ryan just stared at the kid "*of course they called and of course I didn't pick up . . . just one more drink for the walk, the walk to my bottle*" Ryan heard each thought in his own voice like all the rest but this time he really listened and he quickly learned that the kid's twin had died on that very same day a year ago and that also he had not spoken to his family since the accident.

*“I’m done, I’m fucking done with this worthless shit?”* suddenly the word fuck became something more than just a word for Ryan and he was almost in tears for this young man perhaps Ryan’s age had only thought of suicide from the moment he stepped in the store. Ryan knew he had a knife, it was strapped to his belt and the kid approached the counter. “Can.. can I get ya anything else buddy?” Ryan said this smiling as best he could “no just this shit” the hooded boy replied “hey man” Ryan blurted out “listen I got something I need to tell you I know this might be strange” he was looking directly into the boy’s almond brown eyes “but there is someone watching out for you today” “like I see him right behind, you he’s like your guardian angel this is weird though buddy he looks just like you and he looks concerned” the hooded boy just stared back at Ryan his eyes almost seemed hollow but began to fill with tears and anger “you have no idea what the fuck you are saying” the kid said almost too softly and turned his stare towards the door “you have no idea what you’re talking about do you?” he said louder and looked directly into Ryan’s picnic sky blue eyes. The only thing Ryan could think to say was “maybe that didn’t make any sense to you buddy, but sometimes, I just see shit it’s a curse really” a tear rolled down the kid’s cheek “you’re damn right it’s a fucking curse” he yelled and grabbed Ryan by the collar so quickly that before Ryan could blink he could feel the edge of the boy’s blade against his neck “you fucked up” the boy repeated “you fucked up”. Crying already but had strength enough to speak “listen I can’t tell you why I said those things they just come to me brother”. “BROTHER” the hooded mystery said; Ryan could feel the blade shake in the kid’s hand as well as a trickle of blood from his own neck the young man’s grip began to loosen and he slowly let go of Ryan’s shirt “brother” he said again slower and softer. He was staring at his own feet now and walked out of the store as if in a trance before that annoying door bell rang he turned around and took one look at Ryan “*I’m going to call my mother*” was the last telepathic thought Ryan ever heard it was midnight and Ryan watched the Oregon rain fall like tears on Division Street.