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Dark Side

By Jeff Garrity

All right, all right. From the beginning. When I got here. Shit. That's when this whole thing started. Soon as I stepped outta the vator everything was all piled up like one big ass avalanche ready to come down on my head. Started even before I got here cuz I puked up half a sack on that goddamn vator. Who the fuck came up with the idea of stuffing you in a tin can and shooting you up a string ten million miles? About shook me crazy. I'm still not seeing right. The other guy in my cell says my eyes won't be right until the sun's back in a couple weeks. Bullshit. Seventeen hours in that tin can shook all the colors outta my brain. Only good thing is that the restaurant paid for me to get up here.

So I get off the vator and I'm feeling like hell and I can hardly read the signs cuz my eyes and they're all in like a hundred languages and I'm trying to keep my feet on the ground and hanging onto the rails and just following everybody else figuring they know where they're going. I end up in the Forever Nights Casino, cuz what the hell else is anybody gonna do up here? And I figure I should maybe take a minute to get my shit together before I check in with my new job at the Sea of Tranquility, you know, the whole reason I got in the tin can in the first place. But nobody said what time they wanted me there, so I'm sitting at the Forever Nights bar with a beer in front of me hoping my head'll stop rattling and maybe my eyes will get right and I start talking to this Russian guy a couple stools down and he tells me straight out that he's got some weed and I ask if he's selling and he says he is, so we go out back and burn one. Everybody down below says weed's scarcer than shit up here, but he gives me a good price so I buy a few Gs and after we seal the deal he just starts walking away real fast and I wonder why. I mean he left half a beer on the bar and I was gonna twist up another one and return the favor but soon as I pay him he's heading down the strip like he's in a hurry. So I open up the bag and it's full of oregano or some damn shit and I take off running after the guy but I never run up here before so I'm leaping as far as a bus and I'm all outta control and knocking into people and the Russian guy's like some kinda ape working the hand rails, you know, hand over hand with his feet all flopping behind him and I can't keep up so I lose him.

Used to be I wouldn't let something like that go but I figure there's no use risking the good thing I got going and I'm just gonna get on with my life and get to my new job and start making some real money for once. So I take the tram up to three, you know, where the Sea of Tranquility's at. I never even been in a place like the Sea of T so when I walk in I'm like, wow, this is posher'n shit and now I can see how they're gonna pay me so much. I tell them who I am and they take me back to the kitchen and things

are flying in there. Buncha people in all-whites pushing fifty plates a minute. I worked in busy kitchens before but this one's is a hundred times anything I ever seen. I'm feeling kinda invisible cuz everybody's got their heads down doing what they're doing, but this one chef in a pope's hat is pan frying some kinda shrimp and she keeps squirting it with some kinda sauce and making the shrimps do flips like a pro and she starts giving me shit, like where the hell have I been and tells me they're getting slammed and they want to get me trained and start the next day cuz people are sick of working sixteen hour shifts. I'm a team player so I say, sure, get me started, and she tells me I gotta deal with the exec, and she points over by the dishwasher at this big dude all popped-out in whites and he's barking at some busser who looks all meek and scared, and when he gets done with the busser the exec comes over to me and he's all high and mighty so I know just by how his chest's all puffed out that the asshole thinks now it's my turn.

I'm talking about that Mortane guy. The dead guy.

He doesn't even say hello or nothing and he asks me where my knives are at and I say I ain't got any knives. So like ten seconds after the very first time Mortane even lays eyes on me the fucker blows up right in my face cuz I ain't got any knives. I didn't tell him about my granddad's switch in my sock that I carry for, you know, situations, but I know that's not the kinda knife he's talking about anyway. So he's all pissed off cuz getting knives up here ain't even possible and he just keeps beating me up about the knives, saying ain't no way I'm using somebody else's knives cuz everybody needs their own knives and he can't just go out and hire another sous chef up here and a buncha other shit I don't even hear cuz I'm mainly wondering why he's looking at the ceiling when he's screaming at me and then I see his other eye is looking right at me. So I say, damn, man, you oughta get that googly eye fixed cuz I got no idea if you're looking at me or the ceiling. I can see how that got us off to a bad start but at the time I'm just trying to be, you know, conversational. Granddad used to gimme shit for saying what everybody's thinking but nobody says. Discretion is a better man than valor. Something like that. He'd say that kinda thing all the time. But I figure I say stuff cuz I got the guts to say it and other people don't.

So somewhere in all this hollering I figure out that the real problem ain't me, it's that I ain't what they want me to be. I mean, Mortane said something about hiring me to be a sous chef. Shit. The closest I ever got to being a chef was dumping a box of frozen shrimp into the deep fry and waiting for it to beep. So I'm wondering what my cousin told them about me and I'm wondering what the hell I'm sticking my foot into, but I ain't walking out of the deal before I even get a shot at it. I got my career to think about.

I mean, I was going somewhere. Something was breaking my way for once. At least that's what I was thinking when I got the call from my cousin Brenda a couple weeks ago. She was at my other cousin Brenda's wedding down in Akron a few months back and all us cousins are getting drunk and laughing about our fucked up upbringings and all the stupid shit our parents done to us and how we all sorta turned out okay anyway and at some point I'm going on about how I'm sick of riding the bus for an hour to work at Jumbo Gumbo which has to be the crappiest of crap restaurants and it's all the way on the other side of Cleveland in an empty mall and I gotta do it six days a week for shit pay, and then I gotta take the bus back for another hour to my crap apartment that I gotta share with three other dudes and no one's got their own room so we're all at each other all the time. Fucking depressing. Took me two years to go from dishwasher to the deep fry so I figured it's a long wait for a busser job so I can at least get a taste of the tips. So my other cousin Brenda, not the one getting married, she's sitting there with all of us and she's not saying much but after I dump all this shit about my fucked up life she says she's doing HR for ZeroGeeWhiz. They got those floating casinos, and Forever Nights was just opening up and she tells me they pay real good and she could get me a job if I want. I got pretty wasted that night so I barely remember the convo but a couple weeks later she tells me I got a job at the Sea of T making three times

what I was making working the deep fry at Jumbo Gumbo. I figure how bad can it be, even if I gotta be on the Dark Side? I mean, you work in restaurants you got crap hours so it's not like you're getting all kinda sun anyway. So I decide I'll do it and maybe save up some money and come back down with a stash and maybe get an acre somewhere and start growing dope. They're growing the shit outta weed along Lake Erie, getting two crops a year and making big money. Or maybe I'd take the money and put it down on a house. I dunno. Just thought it'd be nice to walk around with a little money for once.

But it's not looking so good for me cuz Mortane's about to bust a vein screaming at me and I'm thinking I gotta figure this out cuz I don't want to go back down already with nothing to show. So I think about what my granddad used to say. You know, life gives you shit, you make lemonade. So I'm thinking that me and Mortane can maybe talk things out a bit but I can tell he's not gonna shut up about the goddamn knives and I'm starting to get pissed and I'm not even listening anymore so I hold up two fingers above his head where his googly is looking and I ask him how many fingers? I'm just wondering if he can see out of that thing and trying to, you know, change the subject, but the fucker shoves me up against the wall for nothing and his face is right in my face and I got the stink of his crap menthol cigarettes filling my nose and he tells me unless I get a set of knives by the next morning I'm fired. So I tell him it seems only right that they give me the tools I need to do my job, or at least tell me I was supposed to bring some goddamn knives, and I tell him I'm having a hard time taking him serious cuz he's acting like some fat ass evil clown blowing up about nothing cuz he's got this personal problem and he's taking it out on me. I almost got a B in psych junior year without even trying so I got some idea what I'm saying.

But Mortane shoves me up against the wall again. Still got a welt on the back of my head, the fucker. I'm pissed and I just want to unload but I'm thinking he's got a kitchen full of help and I got nobody so it's not gonna be a fair fight and I start thinking about what my granddad used to say. You know, maybe there's times you gotta lose to win. If you know you're gonna be on the losing end of something the only thing you got left is saying what a sad sack of shit you are and maybe they'll go easy on you. So I try telling Mortane I been through a pretty rough time of it already with barfing all the way up the string and how I thought draining a few beers would help but it didn't, and I say I just got ripped off trying to get a few Gs of weed that I woulda happily shared with everybody and Mortane rips into me again and tells me if I ever show up for work drunk or high he'll can my ass on the spot. So I tell him I was talking about burning a couple after work, not before work, like I done at every job I ever had. Helps to get all the hurry outta your brain after busting your ass all night. And I tell him my aunt used to smoke a ton of weed cuz her eyes so maybe that would help out with his googly situation.

I shoulda left the googly thing alone. There was no percentage in it. Bringing it up just pissed him off even more. So he pulls his fist back like he's gonna smash my face and I'm thinking bring it on motherfucker cuz at this point I got no idea what to do and getting in a fight will at least sort some shit out. I mean, I'm a million miles from anything and I got no place to stay and I blew my last money on some fake weed and it's looking like maybe I'm gonna have to get back in the puke can again. The day before I'm riding high thinking I got a big time job and some nice paydays coming and now all I'm seeing is Cleveland and Jumbo Gumbo in my future so I'm feeling like I got nothing to lose. If Mortane wants to tango then let's go.

But a couple cooks see him hauling off to punch me so they grab him and they're just barely holding on until this big guy working the dishwasher comes over and tries to hold onto him too, and then some front house dude in a bow tie comes in and they get Mortane's arms all locked up. So I'm thinking maybe all these people hate this guy as much as I do. I mean, they gotta work with the asshole. So since

he's got four guys holding onto him I start bobbing and weaving like I'm in the ring, dancing around him throwing punches that land short, you know, on purpose, and Mortane can't do shit so I tell him I could pop him one on the side of his head and see if that might knock his googly back in place.

So then Mortane gets free, or maybe they let him go. I don't know, but he comes at me real hard so I drop low like I did senior year when we played St. Tim's and I got in for the only play I got in for the whole goddamn year and took out this massive linebacker. The fucker was bigger'n a building. But that all backfired too. I shoulda quit playing football a long time before that but my granddad kept telling me to keep working at it. You'll get your chance, you'll get your chance, he'd say all the time. I got my chance against St. Tim's cuz our stud tailback Jerappi broke his leg second play of the game, but we were throwing it all over the field and busted some long ones so we're only down by two and the game is just about over and we're marching down the field and we're close enough to kick it and pull it out and beat those rich fucks from St. Tim's for the first time in like forever but there's still some time so we're going for the TD and it's a big deal cuz neither them or us had lost yet that year. And then I see the second string tailback coming off holding his shoulder and crying like a baby. So I'm watching this guy balling his eyes out and the coach comes charging at me yelling my name and he looks all pissed off and I'm wondering why the hell he's pissed off at me when I ain't even been in the game. Turns out the third string tailback flunked a test or something so he wasn't even on the depth chart that coach tapes on his door. I stopped looking at that a long time ago cuz it just got depressing seeing I was the number four all the time. Since I'm the only tailback we got left and I'm not in there, coach has to burn our last timeout or we go back five yards and he grabs my facemask and throws me toward the field and I fall on my ass but I get up quick and I'm in the huddle and the clock is running down and we got one more play for a TD and if that don't work we'll kick the field goal and we win if we make it. So our QB goes back to pass and St. Tim's is dogging and nobody even touches this big backer who's freight-training right at me and I'm supposed to stand him up, and put him down. I mean, shit, look at me. What the fuck'm I gonna do? Only chance was to go low and take out his knees so that's what I do and this massive dude flies right over me and slams into our dumbass QB and the ball goes flying a dozen feet in the air and St. Tim's jumps on it and they got the game now and everybody on our side is pointing at me cuz I missed the block. Shit.

Putting that man-mountain on the ground wasn't enough when you got a dumbass QB who can't figure out how to take a step sidewise and he just stands there waiting to get drilled. So the dumbass QB's still down and he tries to stand up but his knees go all wobbly like he just drank a fifth and he's down again so they gotta bring out the ambulance. And then these two linemen from my own damn team come over and give me a buncha shit and throw me down and they're still giving me shit and won't let me up and I can hear people in the stands start cheering. I shoulda quit football a long time before that.

I'm thinking about this cuz Mortane came at me like that backer so I took out his knees and he goes flying into a stainless cart head first and he's down. Blood's dripping on his face and he tries to stand up but he can't do it and he's down again and everybody's freaking like he's gonna die so I start for the door and I hear Mortane telling everybody that I tried to kill him! Shit.

At this point I figure I gotta get outta there before I got zero chance of keeping my job. But I got nowhere to go so I'm wandering around looking in all the fancy ass shop windows and wondering why anyone would come all this way in a tin can to buy a bunch of posh crap you can get cheaper down below and then I see the sports park and I'm watching people do all the low gravity games and figure I want to try the fifty meter board thinking maybe I can impress the bikini girls hanging at the pool but I got no money so I tell the woman checking creds at the door that I'll give her a bag of weed if she lets me in but

she wants to see it first so I keep walking and just start trying doors and find one open and wander through a couple offices like I belong there and I'm in. I go over to the vator door at the bottom of this big ass shiny tower with the fifty meter board on top and the guy at the bottom asks me if I've done it before. I just laugh like I'm a pro and step onto the vator and when I get to the top I realize I'm still wearing all my clothes so I take everything off and drop it all over the side, you know, for when I get outta the pool. I walk to the edge of the board and I'm looking down past my toes at the water looking like a mile down and I jump off and I'm doing about a dozen flips and twisters and floating down and feeling pretty good for the first time since I got here and forget all my worries and then I slip into the water like it's jello or some damn shit and when I come up by the wall I see there's two security dudes standing on my clothes.

I say 'scuse me sirs I need my clothes and they tell me they want to see my ticket. I'm no liar so I tell them I snuck in just for, you know, the one-time experience, cuz I don't have any money and I say I might be fired from my job which means I gotta go back down, so that jump was my only chance and they don't need to worry about me doing it again. One guy's got a blanket in his hands and he tries wrapping it around me but I don't know what he's got in mind so I push him away and the other guy grabs me and throws me down on the tiles and the asshole lands on me with his knee in the middle of my back. I'm hurting pretty bad and I just started thrashing so they stun me and I wake up in some metal room with those two goons standing over me and my clothes all piled up on the table. They tell me if I ever step foot in Forever Nights again they'll put me in the hospital and no one will care. I say they're right about the not caring part cuz I don't know anybody up here and all I met so far is assholes. They think I'm talking about them cuz they look at each other and one says that maybe they oughta get it over with and put me in the hospital right now and the other one says that might be a good idea but he's feeling charitable and maybe I oughta get a chance to fuck up even worse so they can do more than just break something. He says that he's tired of just breaking bones cuz they heal and people don't learn nothing. Shit.

So all I'm thinking is, yeah, yeah, whatever, just let me outta here and I'll worry about next time next time. I tell them I was just having a bad day and I ain't really the kinda guy who jumps off a fifty meter board all naked in front of a buncha people. So they ride with me in the tram back to the vatorport like they figure I'm just gonna jump in the next tin can and head down and as I get off the tram one of them puts out his hand and says no hard feelings. I'm thinking that's a decent thing to say so I reach out and he locks my arm and the other guy breaks my little finger and says it'll be a leg next time. Shit. Still hurts.

So at least I'm not locked up, but I got no idea what time it is cuz the security assholes took my phone and I'm really needing some sleep so I walk to this place, like a little nature spot with some fake grass and fake trees and these little robot rabbits that come up begging to get you to buy some fake food crap. It's hard to sleep cuz the rabbits keep bugging me but when they finally leave me alone I go out like a light. Sometime later another Forever Nights goon drags me off the bench and doesn't even wake me up first. He starts asking me what the hell I'm doing there and I tell him I got no place to go and he says that ain't his problem. So I wander around some more until he's gone and then crawl under some fake bushes and wake up wondering if it was morning or what. I mean, how the fuck does anybody know up here? I don't think there's a clock in the whole goddamn resort so I ask this guy what time it is and he says he don't even know what day it is. So I ask somebody else and find out it's eight thirty. I assume that's AM and I figure I might as well walk to the Sea of T and maybe impress them with how early I get up in the morning cuz I'm still thinking I got an outside chance at keeping my job, but it's really PM and

they're in the middle of the dinner rush but I figure it's just always busy and I still think it's morning so I walk into the kitchen and there's Mortane with his head all wrapped up giving one of the servers a buncha shit and he sees me so he starts coming at me like a fucking wrecking ball with his hands all fisted up. So I fake one way and go the other and duck around one of the lines and just keep moving. Even with Mortane screaming at me the whole time, everybody's just ignoring him and doing their jobs.

Then the asshole picks up a knife, so now people start paying attention and backing away from their stations and then that big dishwasher guy comes over and he's chasing me too. It's just a matter of time before I get caught so I'm about ready to give up when Mortane shoves a stainless cart out of his way and he grabs my shirt and swings the knife at me but I jump back so he misses. He swipes at me again but I dodge it and he buries the knife in the dishwasher's arm cuz he was reaching for me at the same time. The dishwasher's bleeding bad and doing this banshee howl and Mortane is standing there with his jaw dropped looking at what the hell he just done and there's a knife laying right next to me and I just pick it up and swing at his back, but he turns around and it goes right into his chest. Musta missed bone cuz it went deep.

I don't know why I did it. Cuz he tried to do it to me first, I guess. Seems only right.

Other guy in my cell says I got the honor of being the first murderer up here. I know I get in my own way sometimes. That's another thing my granddad always said. Good thing he ain't around anymore or I'd never hear the end of this. He blew off his own damn head last year. He got the cancer before he even hit sixty and didn't want to go through it. Only time I saw him cry was when he told me how scared of it he was. He was good to me. Last thing he told me was that you gotta chase your dreams. I guess that's what I was doing up here. Shit.