

A MAN DIES

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

HOWLING WIND whips a cluster of PAMPHLETS along the empty concrete. Hand-printed words flurried into incoherence.

The paper cluster BREAKS on a bus stop of sheer, transparent glass. Wind scatters its constituent pieces into the world.

INSIDE THE BUS STOP

An impossible quiet in here. Not a hint of wind.

FINGERS TIGHTEN their grip on A BRIEFCASE as the last pamphlets disappear down the block.

EMMETT PROUSS (40s), piercing eyes, inky hair, shoulders downset in permanent earnestness, pulls the briefcase close. He unscrews a metal flask with heavy fingers, takes a drag.

JER (22), the stop's only other occupant, a weaselly, snub-nosed man very much made by his clothes, sidles up. His left hand moves insatiably on the screen of his phone.

JER

First UCab's yours if you want. I'm always five minutes ahead of early.

EMMETT

I'm waiting for the bus.

JER

The bus, no. No service.

Emmett fumbles with the flask. The cap won't screw on.

EMMETT

This is a stop, yes?

JER

No, a remnant. No, the bus is central service only since the beginning of this quarter.

Jer reaches over and screws the flask shut with three decisive twists.

JER

Retreated to the heart of public infrastructure and left its extremities to the numbing cold of private enterprise.

He taps an invisible glass against Emmett's flask. Cheers.

Emmett tests the flask. Shut tight. It disappears into the black folds of his coat. Studies Jer.

EMMETT

Yeah. Cheers. You know what?

But Jer's staring.

A BOXY, MONO-COLOURED CAR approaches and slows, inhumanly precise. Bare except simple, bolded lettering: UTILICAB.

EMMETT

I can wait.

Jer glances at his phone, crosses to the door, does a double take at the screen. Furiously taps.

JER

No.

He pulls the door open. Like a seal is broken -- WIND HOWLS.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Emmett screws his face against the shrill wind as he turns down another empty street. Briefcase hugged to his chest.

Far ahead, a UTILICAB, identical to the first, closest in a line of parked cars.

Suddenly, it REVERSES, fast and smooth along the curb, until it's even with Emmett. His eyes stay locked forward.

The UCab keeps pace, parallel with Emmett, until it's all the way back to its original space, blocked by the car ahead.

Emmett keeps on. UCab left behind.

He shifts the briefcase and dips into his coat. Wrong pocket. Tries again. No flask. The wind whips hair against his face.

He turns back, out of the wind. Stares at the UCab.

The UCab stares back.

INT. UTILICAB - DAY

The windy day snarls by the cab's window, EERILY SILENT once again. Big roads. Few cars. Very few pedestrians.

Emmett fidgets in the back seat on the passenger side, as far from the driver's seat as he can get.

EMMETT

Can you adjust the noise
cancellation in these things?

A FEMALE VOICE from the front, cool and precise.

URSULA (O.S.)

Noise cancellation is available up
to and including total isolation
either front to back, or for any
individual seat.

EMMETT

Yeah. I meant the whole cab. Can I
hear the wind?

A pause.

Then, slowly, the DULL HOWL OF THE WIND envelops the cab,
blunted but audibly powerful.

It rises around URSULA, in the front seat, sleekly humanoid,
monochromatically silver, in a futuristic motorcycle-style
helmet. Her head rotates a PERFECT FOURTY-FIVE DEGREES
towards Emmett.

URSULA

Can you hear the wind?

Emmett sinks back into the seat. Fumbles in his pocket.

EMMETT

Yes. Thank you.

Finally, the flask emerges. He raises it.

EMMETT

Do you mind?

URSULA

No. Open alcohol is surcharged as
indicated.

Emmett squints at the TOUCH SCREEN set in the back of the
front passenger seat.

He pauses, then unstops the flask and swigs.

EMMETT

Music. Anything I like?

URSULA

Music is scaled and surcharged as
indicated.

EMMETT
Paganini's 5th Caprice?

Silence. Emmett eventually takes the cue and glances at the touch screen for pricing.

EMMETT
Please. Yes.

I/E. UTILICAB - DAY

An INCREDIBLY PRECISE CAPRICE NO. 5 accompanies the UCab down the dull streets of a city that looks as though it's been miserably hunched against the biting elements for years.

Emmett's fingers are heavier on the flask every time he pulls at it.

Until he is asleep.

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - DAY

If the city is miserably defiant, the subdivision's houses have surrendered. Windows and even sections of roof are broken, haphazardly patched, or left as untended wounds.

Here, on porches and in yards, there are people. Children play with old car parts and parents flip sun-worn paperbacks.

The UCab turns at perfect angles onto a

QUIET STREET

And stops in front of a house quiet as a photograph.

INT. UTILICAB - DAY

The CAPRICE comes to an ignobly abrupt end.

Emmett chokes on a snore and blinks bleary eyes until the street comes into focus.

EMMETT
Where are we?

URSULA
A designated risk mitigation area.
You are advised that as of the
termination of this ride, you are
no longer considered to be on
domestic soil.

EMMETT
What?

No door handle inside. He kicks at his door, shoves a shoulder against it.

URSULA

This is a rendition. You are being held by UtiliCorp in cooperation with your government on suspicion of plague-carry for the purpose of biometric scanning.

EMMETT

Wait.

The UCab FILLS WITH BLUE LIGHT.

Emmett roars and KICKS THE WINDOW VIOLENTLY. Impervious. He surges forward and GRABS URSULA. He can't move her an inch.

He fights until he is tired, and then he stops.

The BLUE LIGHT FADES around Emmett's ragged breath.

URSULA

Biometric scanning has confirmed that you are guilty of plague-carry. You are officially entering a state of protective quarantine.

Emmett coughs, breathless. Searches unsteadily for the flask.

EMMETT

I'm sick?

URSULA

You carry the potential for large-scale population degradation.

Emmett sips from the flask. Slows his breathing.

EMMETT

Until when? Quarantine until when?

URSULA

Your quarantine is immutable and until death.

Emmett grabs at his briefcase. FINGERS PULL at it with a desperate love.

EMMETT

You can't.

He gathers the ensuing silence in for a yell.

EMMETT
YOU CAN'T!!

Ursula's head turns a perfect forty-five degrees.

URSULA
It's you or them.

Past the implacable deadness of her monochromatic visor, out the window, two GIRLS round the corner, A SOCCER BALL BOUNCING BETWEEN THEM.

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - QUIET STREET - DAY

LAUGHTER REVERBERATES off the soccer ball and curl away into the subdivision.

The GIRLS chip the ball back and forth, aiming at the other's face or breasts or stomach. Gigglingly malicious.

Oblivious, as they near the cab, to the man who PLEADS AND RAGES at the impassive driver in the front seat. A voiceless, unobserved pantomime -- no sound escapes the cab.

One of the girls glances briefly over.

Emmett breaks off mid-sentence and stares back at her.

WHAM!!

The ball smacks her in the neck. She chokes a giggle out.

GIRL
You ASSHOLE!

She ROCKETS the ball back at her friend, who SQUEALS and cowers. The ball hits her and bounces away down the road.

INT. UTILICAB - DAY

Emmett strains his neck forward until the girls leave his line of view.

EMMETT
HEY!

Ursula stares resolutely forwards. Emmett shifts, PULLS HIS BRIEFCASE OUT.

EMMETT
This is a manuscript. It's my third novel and it's the first that I believe in. Yes?
(MORE)

EMMETT (CONT'D)

It's the first that has meaning.
You were taking me to...to my
publisher. For this.

Emmett yanks the briefcase open and pulls out THE MANUSCRIPT.

EMMETT

Novels can have a far-ranging
moral...I believe that THIS novel
can have a positive effect. I
believe that. My death might be...a
societal good. But to lose
this...it's possible, isn't it,
that my...the benefits of my work
can outweigh the...

At the silence, Ursula's head rotates.

URSULA

Many works of art and of genius
have been lost. The population
remains as it is without them.
Healthy, long-lived, and crime free
beyond any historical precedent.

EMMETT

Please. This is not genius, but it
is me. It is me and nothing else
ever will be and I am...important.

Silence hangs.

EMMETT

Take it to my publisher.

URSULA

That is impossible under policy.

EMMETT

Let me contact her.

URSULA

That is impossible under policy.

EMMETT

It's not impossible, you just have
to let me do it --

URSULA

-- Your quarantine is immutable.

EMMETT

-- you FUCKING --

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - QUIET STREET - DUSK

Emmett's roar disappears into the silence of the evening.

The subdivision is quieting, but far off, a DOG BARKS at the girls, and THEY LAUGH.

INT. UTILICAB - DUSK

Through the window, the SUN BLEEDS DYING LIGHT over the peaks of far-off mountains.

Emmett blinks as the last moments of sunlight catch his eye, blinding hot, and looks away.

EMMETT

You can't kill me without a trial.
Yes?

URSULA

Your questions can be answered, but
your quarantine is immutable.

EMMETT

Am I right?

URSULA

You are being passively detained.
Neither UtiliCorp nor your
government have or will have
intended active harm.

EMMETT

Detention here means I'll die.

URSULA

Your life belongs your choices and
your actions. You chose to enlist
the UtiliCab despite your
condition. This cab is bound by
policy.

EMMETT

I didn't KNOW my...

Emmett leans in, RESTS A HAND on the back of Ursula's seat.

EMMETT

What can I do?

URSULA

Anything that you desire to do.
Here.

Her head rotates forward.

URSULA
Surcharges are as indicated.

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - QUIET STREET - NIGHT

FLICKERING LIGHT in the cab, dull and sickly under a HEAVENLY MOON.

INT. UTILICAB - NIGHT

A BLACK AND WHITE SLAPSTICK MOVIE plays on the touchscreen. Drops of TV-LIGHT flicker on Emmett's eyelids. The JAUNTY PIANO of the soundtrack falls dead on his stoney face.

He lolls his head towards Ursula.

EMMETT
People will smell piss and shit and death all over this cab.

URSULA
The seats are absorptive and self-cleaning for your peace of mind.

Emmett's head drops back.

The TV-LIGHT flickers on.

EMMETT
(re: movie)
These were long before my time, but I grew up on 'em. I never could get through the scene with the, the automatic feeding machine without laughing.

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - QUIET STREET - DAWN

Spotted sunlight breaks over the UCab.

INT. UTILICAB - DAWN

Emmett's fingers knead sore muscles in his legs. He shifts positions with a grunt and bangs his head on the window.

Outside, the DEW-SOAKED DAY. Full up of life.

Emmett's fingers curl around the first page of the manuscript.

His head comes up with the vigour and clarity of dawn.

EMMETT

Will a human...is it possible that
any person will ever watch this?
See my death?

Ursula is a tenth of a second longer than usual to respond.

URSULA

Yes.

Emmett licks his lips. Bone dry.

He grabs the flask, screws it open.

Looks inside the cap. Some SLIGHT CONDENSATION. He rubs his
pinky in it and smears his lips.

He caps the flask and TOSSES IT ON THE FLOOR behind Ursula.

EMMETT

Please don't interrupt me.

URSULA

Yes.

Emmett raises the manuscript.

EMMETT

If you are listening: My name is
Emmett Prouss. I have written a
story that I want to tell you. I
might die before it...ends...but it
starts like this.

EXT. VAIL SUBDIVISION - QUIET STREET - DAY

Time pushes the sun and moon across the skies, and their
light across the streets.

INT. UTILICAB - DAY

The dried husk of a corpse's mouth is gasped open.

The manuscript rests in its lap, either closed intentionally
or fallen shut.

The forehead slumps against the window, waxy skin stuck
against the glass.

An ashen hand curls in on itself, drawn tight over bone,
grasping in the empty cab.

FADE OUT.