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The Journalist

Eric first encountered Oliver Borman outside a grand country house in the Hudson highlands, where Oliver was hoeing sand and gravel from the gutter alongside the driveway. A heavy rain had just stopped when Eric arrived, after a long train ride from Manhattan.

Oliver looked up from his work and leaned on his hoe; his broad grin reminded Eric of a long-lost grandfather. He looked at Eric politely but with an inquisitive, grey gaze that made Eric wonder if the real reason for this visit might not be what he expected.

Borman's house displayed a large, weathered elegance, a relic of 19th century gentility. But Oliver himself was a visual anomaly, wearing a string undershirt and baggy work pants that were wet from the rain and sweat. He pulled off his gloves: his handshake was firm and matched an obvious delight in welcoming a visitor, though Eric couldn't imagine why a reporter would be welcome here.

"You must be Eric," Borman said, still grinning.

"I am," Eric replied. "It's an honor to meet you, sir."

"It's entirely mutual." Oliver gestured at the house. "Let's go inside and have a drink."

Eric picked up his briefcase and bag and followed Oliver up the driveway toward the open garage.

"You wouldn't believe how much gravel washes away after a rain like that," Oliver said.

"It looks like a lot of work."

"Oh, it's more like a great excuse to get outside and do something physical for a change."

Borman strode energetically up the driveway, clearly well-accustomed to exertion. He led Eric through the triple garage into the house and pointed to the hallway and the living room beyond. "Just leave your bags here and have a seat," he said. "We'll get you settled later. First I need a drink, and I suspect you do too."

In fact, Eric was still awash in headache-inducing railroad coffee and ersatz orange juice, but he nodded and headed to a couch next to the large bay window. Wet forest surrounded the house in dark saturated green.

"Beer, wine, coffee?" Borman called from the other end of the hall.

"Wine," Eric replied.

A moment later, Oliver strode in brandishing a glass of red and an opened bottle of beer. "Make yourself comfortable," he said, waving vaguely at the room. "I'm going to get dried off. Won't be long."

At the doorway, he turned and added, "I'm really looking forward to our chat."

Now alone, Eric realized the house was even bigger than it seemed from outside. Oliver's footsteps took a long time to fade away, and the reverberant silence evoked numerous large empty rooms. Eric wondered why someone would choose to live alone in such a large place. Perhaps it had a history.

There were three couches, a large coffee table strewn with magazines and interesting objects, a few armchairs and lamps, and a wide stone fireplace with black smoke stains reaching up over the mantel to the high beamed ceiling. Faux kerosene lamps hung between the beams, giving the room an almost theatrically rustic style.

Oliver returned in jeans and a work-shirt. "Sorry to keep you waiting," he said.

"No problem, Professor Borman," Eric replied. "It's an honor to visit your home."

"This is hardly a home," he said. "There's nobody here but me, pretty much, and I haven't given it an ounce of attention in a decade."

Eric glanced out the bay window. "Those gutters were getting some attention, I'd say."

"Necessary evil," Borman said, and then moved uncomfortably in his chair. A strange expression swept across his face, almost a grimace. After a

pause, his voice was a shade deeper. "I pay property tax, too," he said evenly, looking Eric in the eye.

"Sorry, Professor. No offense intended."

"None—" Borman said, inserting an odd pause, "taken."

The man's apparently unbridled cordiality seemed to have dissipated. Perhaps it was Eric's imagination. "I didn't mean to—" he began, but Oliver cut him off.

"Please don't call me Professor."

"Alright. Do you prefer Oliver?"

"I suppose."

"Or something else? Mr. Borman? Doctor?"

Oliver laughed, again showing some easy, friendly energy. "How about Doc?"

"Doc will be fine," said Eric.

"We're interviewing, yes? Shall we start?"

"Sure," said Eric, getting up. "We could start right now if you like."

"You'd prefer to wait?"

"No. Not at all. Let me get my recorder." Eric retrieved his briefcase from the hallway. "Time waits for no man," he mumbled, returning to the couch.

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing," said Eric. He set his recorder on the coffee table; the red LED glowed brightly in the subdued light of the afternoon storm.

"Nothing?" said Borman. "Nothing at all?" He sounded serious.

"No, really. I just was mumbling 'Time waits for no man,'" said Eric. *Conversing with this guy is more complicated than it should be.*

"Hardly," said Borman, leaning forward again, smiling awkwardly. "And you are—?"

Eric hesitated. *Did he just forget my name?*

Borman must have noted Eric's moment of confusion. "I'm terribly busy these days," he said quietly. "How would you prefer to be called?"

"Oh," said Eric, relieved. "Call me Eric. Please."

"Eric it is, then."

Eric sipped his wine; Borman ignored his beer.

"Were you born in New York?" Eric began.

"Up near Kingston. My father had a small farm."

“How long were you involved in farming?”

“Not long. Not at all, in fact. My father switched to selling farm equipment when I was a toddler, and by the time I was 12 we moved to the city.”

“Albany?”

“Schenectady. East side of the river.”

“How did you feel about the move?”

“I didn’t think about it much. I would have preferred staying in the country—a lot more freedom for a kid. And it was in the city that I—” He stopped speaking and looked up at the ceiling.

“What? Did something happen in Schenectady?”

Borman frowned, studying the shadows between the ceiling beams. “No, nothing happened. Not until much later.”

“You seemed about to say something,” Eric ventured.

“Yes. No, we’ll get to that. It was only a few years ago. I had gone back to Schenectady to look up an old friend.”

That’s something I’ll be sure to bring up, thought Eric, but he needed to get the chronology clear. “How was school after you moved?”

“Pretty rewarding, in hindsight. Good grades, new friends, adapted to the new environment. That’s when I got interested in psychology.”

“Really, that young?”

“I guess it was in my blood from the beginning,” Borman said. “When I was a junior in high school I took my first psych course. If you could call it a course. But the die was cast—I couldn’t stop thinking about character traits, relationships, personae, attitudes and fears, the way people treat each other.”

Borman suddenly noticed his beer, and picked it up. He glanced at Eric with a faintly quizzical expression, and then took a long pull.

“I was fascinated by the behavior of my classmates,” he said. “They were so absorbed in their own delusions. Their fantasies ruled their lives, and they didn’t have a clue. I guess I figured if I could get past that, I could live in freedom.” He shrugged, and pressed his lips together. “Little did I know,” he said.

“About what?”

“Oh, about how far this adolescent fascination would take me. Where

it would all lead.” His face had collapsed into a bitter grimace, and he slumped in his chair, holding the beer bottle at a precarious angle.

Eric frowned. Was this famous psychologist, author of several paradigm-shifting books, regretting his own field of study? “Was there some other area you would prefer to have focused your energies?” Eric said.

Borman looked up, surprised. He straightened, shifted in his chair, and almost dropped the beer bottle. He set the bottle down, and smiled sheepishly. “Sorry,” he said. “I sometimes get lost in thought.”

“No problem, Doc,” said Eric.

“Was I gone long?”

“Long? Not at all. Just a couple of seconds.”

“Seemed like longer,” said Borman, pensively. “But of course it’s always shorter and shorter, actually.”

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“No, no, of course you wouldn’t be. Private joke. Not very polite of me. My apologies. There’s a lot on my mind these days. Ah, where were we?”

“You were describing how you first became interested in psychology.”

“I was?” He seemed genuinely surprised. “Well, it all started in my junior year, when I became fascinated with psych in a course taught by Mr. Waller. It was very superficial, but it fired up my imagination in a thousand ways, and I never looked back.”

“Was that when you realized it would become your life’s work?”

“I suppose so. I’ve been very fortunate, really. It all came quite naturally. I didn’t have to force myself to study. In fact, I couldn’t stop reading all the books I could get my hands on. In psychology, that is. Those were wonderful years.”

He settled back in his chair with a happy, wistful smile.

“I did miss life on the farm, though,” Borman said. “That was also a very happy time. Less pressure. I love being surrounded by nature, and the city is so cold and dirty. Not real dirt, mind you, like the mud in my gutters. Just dirtiness.”

“You mentioned a trip back to Schenectady,” Eric said.

“Did I?”

“You said it was not very long ago, and you’d gone to see a friend.”

“I said all that?” Borman looked aghast. “Are you sure? You’re not trying to lead me into something?” He sounded puzzled and suspicious.

Eric pointed at the pocket recorder. "I can play it back for you, but please believe me, I don't want to push you into anything you're uncomfortable with."

Borman relaxed a little. The twinkle returned to his eyes, and he said, "Eric, please don't mind my little mood swings. Perhaps I absorbed some of the neuroses I've studied for so long. I've got so much on my mind."

"Not a problem. Feel free to change the subject any time."

"You're too kind," Borman said. He drank some more beer. Eric sipped his wine. Thunder rolled softly across the sodden landscape outside.

"Would you rather not talk about Schenectady?" Eric asked.

"No, I guess it's fine. Whatever you think should be in the article."

"I was wondering about your friend. The one you were going to visit."

"Oh, Mr. Waller. My old psych teacher in high school. He was getting on in years, and I wanted to let him know what a positive influence he'd been. We so seldom acknowledge the people who change our lives that way."

"Did you see him?"

"Actually, no. I never got that far. What happened hasn't got anything to do with Mr. Waller. If I *had* seen him maybe things might have been different."

"Different how?"

"Well, this present situation, it might—" Borman stopped abruptly. He closed his eyes for a few seconds, and twisted around.

Eric waited, wondering if he was witnessing something personal that was none of his business.

Borman opened his eyes and looked out the bay window at the trees. Eric took another sip of wine. *Something's wrong: should I keep going?*

Borman turned back to look piercingly at Eric, a frown etched into his face. "What was I saying?" he said.

Eric decided confrontation might be unwise. "We were talking about Mr. Waller."

"What the hell did I tell you?" Borman snapped.

Eric flinched. "Just that he was a great inspiration, and that you never did get to visit him that day."

"I see," said Borman. He seemed to be growing angry, but it wasn't clear where his anger was directed.

“I gather something happened to interrupt your visit,” Eric said, cautiously.

“You can bloody well say that again.” Borman collected himself and tried to smile. “I must apologize. The intervals are so short now.”

“Intervals?”

“Yes, I can hardly get any momentum going. Can’t cover it up anymore.”

Eric pondered. “Are you having some kind of episodes?”

Borman gave a short, bitter laugh. “Episodes! Yes, I guess you could say that.”

“Is this something you’d rather not discuss?”

“It’s something I’d bloody well rather not experience,” he said.

Eric took that as a No and had another sip of wine, waiting.

Eventually Borman said, “I suppose it’s too late to keep it to myself. I don’t know how it will end, but perhaps your article is the place to let it all out.”

Eric waited; the interview was finally opening up.

Borman sighed and cleared his throat. “It started three years ago, in Schenectady. I parked near the high school, thinking I’d walk to Mr. Waller’s house and take in the old sights. It was a pure nostalgia trip, of course. I don’t know if I really thought I’d find Waller or if he’d even care about my life.” He laughed again with a thin smile. “What a farce!”

Eric said, “What happened?”

Borman shook his head. “I really don’t know. Something happened, and I’ve examined every minute of my life since that day, and it must have happened while I was walking, because that’s the first time I lost track.”

“Lost track of what was happening?” *Like you’ve just been doing?*

“Yes, that’s about it. I was walking along Parkwood Boulevard, and suddenly I was in a hotel room in Manhattan.”

“You blacked out?”

“It couldn’t have been a blackout, because it turned out I’d lost a whole month. I thought it was amnesia, but there were no further symptoms for another month. And then it happened again. I was walking across the front lawn—” He gestured out the side windows of the living room. “And then suddenly it was the middle of the night, and I was sitting bolt upright in bed, upstairs in this house—” His voice trailed off.

“How long had it been this time?”

“It took me until morning to get things sorted out, but it was another month. Probably a few days less.”

“But what was happening in your life while you were away?”

“That’s what flummoxed me at first,” Borman replied. “I started asking around, and everyone swore that I had been perfectly normal during these periods. I wasn’t acting different, and nobody noticed a thing. Except that I was developing a reputation for being a bit forgetful. Absent-minded professor. Not a big deal.”

“I guess not. But it must have been incredibly disorienting.”

“A very big deal for me, that’s for damn sure,” he said, clenching his teeth. “But it wasn’t just a few episodes. They kept happening.”

“How often? Are they still happening? Have you seen anyone about it?”

Borman looked at Eric like an errant pupil in grade school. “Of course I bloody well saw someone about it. I know half the psychologists in the US, and all of the good ones. I’ve talked about it with anybody who could have an opinion, but nobody has a clue.” He paused again. “Hell, I don’t have a clue.”

“But surely it’s not that unusual. Aren’t blackouts fairly well understood?” Eric asked.

“Sure, most blackouts have a cause. But we’ve never seen blackouts where the patient is perfectly normal during the blackout. So it’s obviously *not* a blackout. It’s some kind of periodic amnesia, repeating episodes of absolutely no memory.”

“Wouldn’t that be a completely new syndrome?”

“Well, that’s what I thought, at first.”

“You changed your mind?”

“That’s a painfully ironic way of putting it.” Borman muttered. He snatched the beer bottle and took a long drink. “I changed my mind when I started taking detailed notes. The next time I came back from a blackout, it was suddenly quite clear.” He paused again, looking out the window. “As clear as it’s ever going to get, I suspect.”

Eric wanted to jump up and call his publisher. This interview was turning into a whole series of articles, one of which was a very personal exclusive on one of the most famous men in America. An unsettling,

possibly tragic exclusive that could lead to headlines and bylines and possibly an entire career in the limelight.

With some difficulty, Eric took another drink of wine, fighting to disguise his excitement. "What happened with your notes?" he asked, softly.

Borman didn't respond. He was sitting quite still, staring at Eric, his face devoid of emotion. He blinked several times, and took a deep breath. "What did I just say?"

Eric suddenly got it. "Did you just have one?" he asked.

"One what?" said Borman.

"Episode?"

"What episode?" said Borman. Then he squinted and stared at Eric even harder. "You mean spell?" he said.

"Episode, spell, I don't know," said Eric. "You were describing these periods of amnesia, or something like that. Then you suddenly stopped."

Borman sat back, shocked. "You mean I've told you about it?"

"Yes. I think you just did."

"Wow." Borman sighed. Then he smiled and said, "Well, I guess I must have thought it's the right time. I thought we were going to keep it secret a bit longer, but it's happening so fast it must be time."

"Time for what?" said Eric.

"I get these spells. I forget things, and then everything's normal again. But it's not really forgetting."

"Not amnesia?"

"Not in the slightest. It's MPD."

"Multiple Personality Disorder?" said Eric, amazed. "How could it possibly be MPD?"

"Well, it ain't your grandfather's MPD," Borman said, with a forced chuckle. "Both personalities are me. You've been talking to me, Oliver Borman, since you arrived, haven't you?"

Eric nodded.

"Well, it's been two of me. I'm cycling between two personalities, but they're both the same one. The only real effect is to give each of us periods of amnesia. But the spells alternate precisely, so in a sense I'm always here, experiencing everything, all the time. It's just that it's not the same 'I' each time."

“That’s incredible,” said Eric.

“We’ve been leaving each other notes lately,” Borman said. “And as soon as we started exchanging messages, it was obvious that I was writing all of them.”

Eric gaped, then shut his mouth.

Borman continued. “But that’s begun to change.”

“How is it changing? A third personality?”

“No, not another personality. But our time-slices, our experiences, are slightly different, so we’re *becoming* slightly different. Haven’t you noticed anything inconsistent about my behavior? I’m alternating every few minutes now.”

Eric thought about it. Borman had been acting cheerful for a while and then inexplicably testy and annoyed. “Yes, I was wondering about that,” Eric said. “I guess I’m currently talking to a happier Oliver Borman.”

“Exactly,” said Borman. He glanced at his watch. “In another couple of minutes you’ll be talking to the other me, the one that’s pissed off.”

“It’s strange that the two of you are so different.”

“Not really. We’ve had three years—well, half of three years each—of different life experiences, different events, different responses. Especially at the beginning, when each cycle lasted for weeks.”

“I guess so.”

“The other me has every right to be angry, because of what happened when he was present. He screwed up some projects, or at least he was there when the shit hit the fan. When this all began, neither of us had any idea what was going on, and naturally we tried to cover it up. But I was the one who decided to contact my professional peers to explore the syndrome, and he was the one who got all the letters telling him he was psychotic. And he was also the one who got the termination letter from the university. And a lot more. It was just bad timing, but I precipitated all that, and he got to enjoy the results. It pissed him off, understandably, as it would have pissed me off. And I guess it changed him.”

“That’s incredible,” said Eric.

“You said that already.”

Eric laughed uneasily. “You’ve been repeating yourself a bit, too.”

Borman laughed. This persona seemed reasonably comfortable with itself, and Eric dreaded the return of the other Borman.

Another distant roll of thunder gently shook the house.

“Rip van Winkle,” said Borman.

“Yeah. Just woke up,” Eric replied.

They sat for some time without speaking. Then Eric began to worry about the imminent shift of personas, and wondered if he would be able to see it happening. Borman must have noted Eric’s fascination, because he said, “Go ahead and study me. There’s not much time left. Maybe you’ll learn something we can use.”

“Why do you keep saying you’re running out of time?”

“I’m not sure. We’re not sure. But the alternation is happening faster and faster. This morning it was almost twenty minutes, and now it’s well under ten. In fact, I—”

Eric studied Borman’s face, and it looked like a sheet of water momentarily rippled across, very delicately distorting the man’s entire body.

Borman squinted at Eric. “How long?” he said.

“I was watching your face. I could see it happen,” said Eric.

“How long?” Borman demanded.

“Six or seven minutes, give or take.”

“Time this,” said Borman. “We need to know.”

“But *what* will we know? The whole thing is still a complete mystery.”

“We have to time it, find out how fast it’s accelerating.”

“What can that possibly tell us?” said Eric.

“When it will end.”

Eric slumped. What would happen when the alternation was every minute? Would Borman go mad? How fast could it get? Ten seconds? Half a second?

“What does it feel like?” Eric asked.

“Nothing. Can’t feel it at all. Did you note the time?” Borman was visibly agitated.

“Twenty past two.”

“God.”

“Yeah.”

They sat quietly, and Eric’s head spun.

After a few minutes, Borman sat up straight. “We should be recording this,” he said.

“We are,” said Eric, pointing at the voice recorder.

“No, the time of each cycle,” said Borman.

“We are. You started this cycle at two twenty.”

“No I didn’t! I just came back.”

Eric looked at his watch. It was twenty-four past two. “Four minutes,” he said.

“God.”

“I didn’t see it that time,” said Eric.

“You can see it happen?”

“Yes. Your whole body sort of ripples. Just a little. Can’t you feel it?”

“No, I can’t feel the shift. But I can feel the discontinuity. When I’m here, I’m constantly looking back in my mind to see what’s just happened, and it’s kind of like a black, mental thump. Suddenly there’s nothing to remember since my last period of occupancy. It’s all happening in the mind, but it affects my whole sensorium. Hard to explain.”

“Yeah, really hard to explain.”

“Four minutes, eh? Down from seven?”

Eric nodded.

The watery shiver ran across Borman again. He closed his eyes for a second or two and then said, “How long?”

Eric looked at his watch. “Three minutes.”

“Shit. That’s not even time enough to talk about it.”

“Sure it is,” said Eric. “What do you think is going to happen?”

“How should I know?”

“Well, you’re the one experiencing it. Maybe you have an insight?”

“Insight based on what?” Borman grumbled. “Maybe we’ll just both go black.”

“Go on.”

“Or maybe it will be unbearable, and we’ll go stark raving mad.” He sat in stony silence. “How the hell should I know!”

Eric watched his host, who now sat stiffly, as if awaiting a jolt of electricity. His empathy for what Borman was going through had grown, and he no longer obsessed about his journalistic career. And he couldn’t take his eyes off Borman.

The ripple came again.

“Two minutes,” said Eric. Borman grimaced.

“You know,” said Borman pleasantly, “Maybe when the oscillation gets fast enough the two of us will just merge. Probably under one millisecond the nervous system can’t sustain it, so both personae will have to coexist. It could just resolve itself spontaneously.”

Borman was grinning, and Eric felt a pang of compassion. This was unknown territory, of course, but some kind of merger might indeed be the most likely outcome.

There was another ripple, and Borman’s body stiffened again.

“50 seconds,” said Eric.

“Too fast,” said Borman.

They waited in awkward silence while Eric stared at his host. Borman stared at nothing, waiting.

Another ripple.

“Wow,” said Borman. “This is really strange. It’s actually not so bad. I think—I hope to God, that is—that this merging idea might turn out to be a reasonable prediction.” His voice was hopeful, even positive, but he was still visibly agitated.

Eric exhaled, inhaled, and again his host’s figure rippled ever so slightly, and Borman’s face shifted. “Bloody hell!” he said.

In a few heartbeats, there was another shift, and the other Borman reappeared, and his face snapped into the previous forced smile.

He began to speak, and then shifted again. The ripples were almost constant now, and Borman’s expression began to look like a cartoon, twitching back and forth between his two personas.

“I can’t—”

“What—”

“—take—”

“—the—”

“—this—”

“—fuck—”

“—any—”

And then Eric saw, or felt, a kind of blur overtake first Borman’s face and then his whole body, and Eric realized whatever he was witnessing wasn’t just psychological. Borman was changing physically; something more extreme was happening.

Eric felt a kind of low buzz, like a muffled drum roll, and wondered if

it might be more thunder from outside. He glanced out the bay window, and then back at Borman, but Borman now sat rigid, vibrating like a silent jackhammer, and Eric thought he could somehow sense it happening.

It was too much to take in. His sense of reality was crumbling, while the man he had been talking to minutes before had become a blur before his eyes. Tiny fragments of human speech were sputtering from the Borman blur, and Eric turned away again, and then realized he was going to pass out. *I've got to remain objective*, he thought, feeling a desperate sense of helplessness. He peeked back at Borman again, and the room went black.



Eric came to almost immediately. A far-off peal of thunder rattled the living room windows, and he opened his eyes.

Only a few minutes had passed, and he realized the room had become silent and still. Whatever was happening to Borman had stopped. The other man slouched in his chair, the beer bottle on its side, spilling onto the wood floor. Eric picked it up.

“Doc?” he said. “Oliver? Professor? Are you OK?”

Borman remained motionless. After a little while Eric summoned the courage to touch his shoulder, and then it was sufficiently obvious that the man was dead.

Eric collapsed onto the couch, exhausted and shaken. Eventually, he came to his senses and called 911. A seizure. Ambulance. He’s not breathing.

The police arrived just before the paramedics, and asked the usual questions. There was no evidence of foul play. Did Eric have any notes from the interview? Yes, a few pages, but nothing substantial. Anything else? Nothing. The recorder was back in his briefcase. Eric knew the recording wouldn’t do the police any good, none at all.

In the days that followed, Eric did his best to write down his recollections of Borman’s dilemma and his demise, but work was nearly impossible. He spent his afternoons wandering Central Park. Once or twice he climbed the steps of the Metropolitan Museum, but suddenly realized that a deluge of diverse creativity from all cultures and epochs would only further strain his tenuous grip on reality.

After a few more weeks, Eric began to feel normal again, and his

notes were starting to come together. He transcribed the recording of his interview, and pounded out a rough manuscript describing the events and revelations at Borman's house, including every detail his journalist's training could recover. His publisher had been badgering him to get a story in print while the news of Borman's death was still fresh.

Eric stuffed the printout of his latest revision into his briefcase. *I wonder if anyone will believe this*, he thought, as he headed for the elevator. A wave of doubt swept over him. He could imagine his publisher's reaction: "The public is expecting an account of a great man's last interview, not an insane fantasy. What the hell are you thinking?"

He spun around and returned to his apartment. A quick call to his publisher to postpone their meeting would suffice. He would just write up a solid, imaginary interview, describe the professor's seizure in plausible terms, and end with a respectful contemporary eulogy.

As he sat down at his desk, he blinked, and the room was gone. He was standing in a hotel bathroom with a safety razor in his hand, staring into the mirror. For a brief moment, the face peering back at him looked almost like Borman's, and then he realized he had no idea where he was, or how he got there.