

## Boy Bob

There exists in a city a towering, glimmering structure with hundreds of windows and no vision. A busy building with a particular busy floor lined with cubicles. Bob used to work in one of those cubicles.

His friends always called him Boy. His coworkers did, too. In fact, only his mother ever called him Bob.

Nobody knew why.

Bob used to stare at a screen of numbers and dance with his fingers over a dusty keyboard. He kept his sanity by learning to work almost unconsciously. Sometimes, without missing a key, he dreamed.

He dreamed of dreaming. Of when he used to dream.

"Ah!" he said once, flinching, pushing back against his chair, looking away from his computer.

"Sorry I startled you," said Diana the coworker. "Are you feeling okay?"

He stared at her for a second. "Huh? Yeahyeah, fine. I just spaced out there for a minute... What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," she said. "Couple of us are going for some drinks. Thought you might like to come."

Bob looked at his watch. "That late already?"

"Time flies when you're having fun. You coming?"

Bob never had before. Bob hadn't been out drinking in quite a while. He used to drink a lot. He had stopped for some reason...

"Sounds great," Bob said.

Bob and coworkers drank and were merry late into the night. People laughed and people talked and people puked. Bob's new favorite drink was scotch.

"Some alcoholics die for lack of dreaming," said a man from a stool. "It's their blackouts."

Bob nodded gravely. "I'm Boy," he said, extending his hand.

"Jim," said the man from the stool, shaking Bob's hand.

The pair never conversed again. But Bob stopped drinking that night.

There was blurry clatter when Bob got home. Sliding and stumbling into the bedroom, basking under comforting covers and glorious AC. Then he closed his eyes and spiraled into another world.

*Returns the Dreamer*, said some faint, buzzing voice. *Returns too late*.

Beautiful fields of exotic flowers aromatically invited dancing bees.

Feeble-minded winged beauties chanted welcoming chirrup. A stone castle loomed over the hilly horizon. Winds passed jovial whispers. Clouds coated clear skies like whipped cream. It was as Boy remembered, *finally* remembered.

For a moment.

As Boy walked the glittering golden path through the Paradise Fields, the only above-grounds means to Triumph Castle, he noted a few cracks in the precious bricks. The further he walked, the more numerous the cracks. Soon weeds grew through, devouring gold in a puke green-brown.

The sky turned black for night. Cream clouds whipped lightning. Dirty rain muddied and muddled Paradise Fields.

Boy found a large purple beast sleeping beside the path. He kicked its side to wake it, to ask questions. Then he gasped at a smell. He blinked and staggered back.

He had discovered the corpse of Barney. Within Barney's strangling grasp was held the neck of a lifeless fairy. Miniatures of Montel Williams and Opera and Jerry Springer were gnawing on Barney's legs. Somebody plucked an eye from the only semiartificial eyehole in the only semiartificial purple suit.

The homunculi hosts stared. Boy went back to walking the decadent path. He wore polished platinum armor then, for he knew some tyrant had usurped his throne. An old, familiar mace felt comforting in his hands.

Horrible things littered the glittering golden path. More horrible things had fallen beside it.

Boy approached Triumph Castle's gloomy wooden doors like people sometimes do in old horror movies when their cars break. He was ready to splinter wood with his mace when the doors creeeaked open. Of course no one was there.

The castle was vast and only vaguely like the remembered, yet potent with familiarity. Much was there to explore. Boy's gut dragged his cling-clanging feet up swirling steps.

Laughter came from a room without a door. Only Boy should have been allowed within the room without a door. Only he had the key. He knew enough to use it then.

There it was, sitting in regal suit and tie, upon Solitude Throne. It was bouncing jokes off a jester, eliciting dutiful laughs no matter the joke. Then it laughed, and laughed, and laughed, as Boy spiraled into the real world.