

TEXT ADVENTURE

*'FLAT
EYES'*

by
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1

September.

He turned down the contrast on his visor and the room faded back into view.

What was the woman saying? Distraction from subliterate.

“Take that stupid thing off,” she said, sounding annoyed.

“Hey, it’s the ‘40s, babe.”

He didn’t understand the objection. His face looked fine.

He kicked at a loose piece of carpet.

“Help me with these boxes,” she said.

“I have homework.”

“So, start reading.”

2

Deep in the basement, his stomach hurt.

The woman didn’t understand him. Hadn’t, really, since he’d come down here. She didn’t even have eyes.

He had offered his visor, but she had made it clear that she wasn’t interested.

The humidity in the basement was a problem. Unusual. He worried about her electronics. Somehow, her equipment kept functioning.

The woman had taken in several children. At least, he didn’t believe they were hers. They were almost always underfoot. It was hard to keep them from digging around in his belongings.

He leaned back in his chair and examined his paperwork.

3

“Claims desk.”

He answered the phone in the usual manner. The script hovered, insistently, several subjective feet in front of him. But by now he had committed its contents to memory. The script was no longer necessary.

The old woman had coached him. Sharpening his diction. Taught him how to handle the problem customers. Another thing he didn’t need.

“Your voice. You sound like a girl,” she would say.

What was that supposed to mean?

“Bright,” he stated into the phone.

“What? Who are you? You sound like a girl.” Aha. This customer wielded a sharp wit.

“Et tu, everyone?” he said, under his breath.

The customer hung up.

4

After his shift he tried some writing. The old woman would want to follow his progress. He stuck to the basics: date, time, location, principals; a tally of events.

Her reaction was predictably flat.

He knew what she would say. Back to the training software.

He noted the response.

A year of this work and he would have enough to finish the report.

5

There was no reason to return to the apartment upstairs. His furniture had never been delivered. Besides, everything he owned fit into his shoulder bag.

The closet floor had healed over.

And the old woman didn't like him talking about home.

He sat down on his bed and paged through the day's results. Callers from around the world. All former residents of the basement. Why they had had the number.

There were more names than he had thought.

Several, he recognized.

6

"Get out, flat eyes." She stood below the ceiling and pointed up, gesturing at the floor above. "You're not wanted here."

He dropped his leaf into his bag and carefully made his bed.

The old woman crossed his name off of her list.

There hadn't been enough time to gather the information he needed.

He was being asked to leave, anyway.

Thomas climbed into the ceiling.

