

A Bearable Darkness of Being



A short story by
Rand Eastwood

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A Note From The Author

I had this idea bouncing around in my head for quite some time before I finally penned it for my dark fiction collection [Rolling The Bones: 12 Tales of Life, Death, Loss, & Redemption](#)—which comprises 8 short stories, 3 novellas, and a short novel—and it unexpectedly became one of my favorite stories in the book, exuding a sort of mysterious "Twilight Zone" atmosphere that I really like—quite different from much of my other work.

I hope y'all enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rand Eastwood', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

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"Fear no shadows, least of all that great spectre of personal unhappiness which binds half the world to orthodoxy."

~ Thomas Huxley

"Jeff, you can't live the rest of your life being afraid of your own shadow," Mortensen said, his beady eyes peering over the top of his bifocals, looking at me in the condescending way that he always does.

That was when I ended the sessions.

My old man used to say the same exact thing—usually right after I came running in the house crying, having been picked on by one or more of the local bullies—and right before he beat the living shit outta me. Or sometimes, if his drinking was bad—which it was, more often than not, there toward the end—right before he made me his *bitch*.

...your mother left, the ungrateful cunt, so you're the bitch of the house now...hell, you look enough like her...and you're such a pantywaste when it comes to being a man and standing up for yourself, you might as well BE a bitch...now get your skinny little ass over here...

Whenever he started undoing his belt, I never knew which way it would end; a simple good lashing was always my hope—even if it drew blood.

That was way better than the alternative, anyway.

I'd been seeing this shrink, Dr. Mortensen, for a few weeks, at this clinic called Silver State Social Services—one of those state-subsidized rehab places that they send you to instead of prison, if you're lucky—and I figured if the state was gonna pick up the tab, I should at least *try*.

And I *did* try. I really did. I thought if this guy could just turn the right screw, find that loose nut in my head and tighten'er back up—then voilà! I'd be fixed.

We were discussing my decision-making abilities (or, more properly, lack thereof). He was explaining to me how, when making a decision, we first consider all the possible factors beforehand, then make the decision and take action, then later assess the results—and adjust our new decisions and actions accordingly. That it's all sort of a meandering process, and we have to constantly correct course to keep ourselves on track to our goals.

He told me that healthy people, when assessing the results of their decisions and actions, understand that if the results aren't exactly what they wanted, then they shouldn't consider them *wrong*, but simply—and, inevitably—*different* than what they had expected or hoped for. And that this is normal. The results never turn out to be *exactly* what we had intended; best we can hope for is something close.

But “unhealthy” people (I knew what he *really* meant was *fucked-up* people, like me), rather than viewing the results of their decisions and actions as simply *different* from what they had expected or hoped, instead view them as *wrong*.

So they berate themselves, thinking that once again they made the wrong decision, did the wrong thing, fucked up, and got the wrong results. Keep up this trend, and over time we become afraid to make any decision whatsoever, since every single damn time everything ends up wrong, or fucked up.

But I wasn't buying it.

After all, my mom slowly picking herself up off the kitchen floor,

bruised and bleeding and crying (again), and then quietly disappearing that night, never to be seen or heard from again, was not *my* decision.

And me taking her place wasn't *my* decision, either.

And, come to think of it—neither was getting my ass kicked practically every day when I got off the school bus way down the street. And then getting it kicked *again* when I got home...

So I thought he was full of shit, really. But whatever.

But then his little wisecrack about me being afraid of my own shadow ended everything. Suddenly, there I was, sitting scared and vulnerable in front of my old man, all over again.

I almost expected Doc to start unbuckling his belt...

No way. Not this time. Not ever again.

I'm old enough now to make my own decisions—and, as he says, deal with the results; and so my decision, at that moment, was to stand up, walk out of his office, and never go back.

Next few days, I ignored his phone calls, deleted his voicemails without bothering to listen to them. Figured it probably wouldn't be long before my probation officer would be calling, so I needed to figure something out.

Meantime, I'm just focused on surviving, and that's it.

My life has become mostly a blur. Sometimes it's the tears; sometimes it's the booze. But mostly, it's just my life; nothing's ever clear, nothing ever makes much sense to me. Everything always seems to just blur together.

If nothing else, at least I have a job. Mostly part time, over at Frank's car wash.

Turns out Frank is a recovering alcoholic—or drug addict, not sure which, maybe both—and so works with Silver State, along with other rehab centers and halfway houses, giving part-time, low-stress, low-responsibility jobs to people who are trying to get their heads on straight and start over, and can't get a job anywhere else. For us, it's a second

chance—last chance, for some—and it sure as hell beats going to prison.

And Mortensen himself is in the program too. Guess he fell down pretty hard when he first moved here from Montana (talk about culture shock, huh?). What I hear, his wife had just died of cancer, and so he started coming here to forget about things for awhile. He liked it, so he eventually moved here. But then he got hooked into the gambling scene and all that free booze these Las Vegas casinos like to pour down your throat to loosen up your wallet, and—well, he fell down.

Hard.

So he got himself into the program, got himself cleaned up, and now he works with guys like Frank to get guys like me into jobs like this.

And it's a decent program, y'ask me—though I've noticed, believe it or not, that most the people who come in through the program don't make it very long. Sooner or later they come in drunk, or high, or get caught stealing or some shit. Or, most often, just stop showing up—I don't know, back on the streets I guess. Or in jail, or the hospital, or who knows. Maybe dead.

It's a revolving door, really.

So Mortensen hooked me up with a job with Frank, and so far, I've been able to keep it up. It's not bad—easy work, light schedule. Doesn't pay much, but I get tips too, which is good, cuz they're off the books, which keeps my reported down to where it's enough to pay my rent, with a little left over—but not so much that I risk losing my Section Eight. Good thing, too, cuz I'd never be able to afford a regular place. And besides, the people...*normal* people? I don't need any of that.

I like it where I'm at.

And I can party on my tips and nobody knows.

•

No car, so I pretty much walk everywhere. Usually alone, just me and my shadow. And here in Las Vegas—the desert—your shadow can get pretty long. Especially late in the day, just before the sun drops behind

Mt. Charleston and the cool air comes rushing down off the mountains on all four sides of the city, sucked into the superheated valley.

It's kind of strange, really: I'll be walking down the street, minding my own business, and happen to turn to the east—and there's my shadow, already up there, ahead of me; I wanna run to catch up.

And after awhile, I began to notice they're everywhere—giant, dark, exaggerated versions of everyone, pantomiming their every motion in sharp, silent relief. And once I noticed this shadow world, it was impossible for me not to.

So I started watching it.

It's fascinating. Like another world, a parallel universe of sorts, a silent echo of reality, a subliminal alter-life hustling and bustling beneath us, going about its business mostly unnoticed.

And it wasn't long before I noticed something else: at first glance, the perception is that the shadows are *following* their owners, mimicking them; but after observing them for awhile, I would swear, it seemed more like the shadows were *leading* their owners around, and the owners themselves were actually the followers!

I began to wonder who, exactly, is in charge of our lives...

After all, if our shadows are actually the ones in charge, and we are merely their puppets, then that would explain my extremely shitty life; maybe I've just got a really shitty shadow!

Although this idea was fascinating at first—maybe even a little frightening—over time I guess I just got used to seeing all those shadows criss-crossing everywhere, leading their people around, forcing them into submission, and so it got to where I didn't pay much attention to them anymore.

Hell, I got to where I barely even noticed my own.

But one day, that changed.

•

It was a busy Saturday at work, and the tips were better than usual, so

I decided to splurge and take the bus home. It was fucking hot out, middle of August, and if nothing else, at least the bus is air-conditioned.

The stop is about a half-mile from my neighborhood, so I jumped off the bus and was walking home, thinking about the beer awaiting me in the fridge. As I trudged along, the late-day sun stretched my shadow way out behind me. Judging by my shadow, you'da thought I was an NBA player or something.

Suddenly, I thought I caught movement out of the corner of my eye, so I stopped and looked behind me—but I didn't see anything unusual, so I shrugged, blew it off, continued my trek.

Then maybe half a block later I saw something again, and this time glanced over my shoulder just in time to see my own shadow sidling up beside me—then snap back behind me when I looked!

I stopped, turned, lifted my sunglasses. Doubting what I had seen, I watched my shadow closely as it duplicated my every move, stretched out before me in exaggerated, twenty-foot swings.

I looked around.

Nobody.

Just me and my shadow.

Jeffrey, my man, you're losin it...

Perplexed, I hurried home, afraid to look behind me again, no matter what I thought I saw out of the corner of my eye.

Once home, I cracked a beer, cranked up the stereo, and eventually forgot all about it.

Next day, going back to work, I took the bus again—but was stopped up front, the driver saying I didn't pay the fare. I'd dropped the exact change in the meter just like I was supposed to, but for some reason the digital meter said I was short a dime. I knew I wasn't—double-counted before I left home, just to make sure—and told the driver I *did* pay, his meter was just messed up. But when I started down the aisle to find a seat, he stopped me again, said I had to either pay up or get off.

Problem was, I didn't have a dime; I only brought the exact change from home. That was all I had on me.

Now, I don't like to argue with people; I don't even like to *talk* to people, usually. I don't understand people, I don't like people, and, growing up, I learned that saying anything at all to others could mean getting my ass kicked—or worse.

So I keep my mouth shut; it's safer that way.

Easier.

So, I ended up off the bus and out on the curb. As the driver glared down at me from his worn, duct-taped seat, I berated myself: I should have stood up for myself; should have stayed on the bus; should have at least demanded my money back...

Or, as my old man used to chant, mocking me when I was making my feeble excuses: *shoulda woulda coulda...*

Instead, I kept my mouth shut, like I always do; took his crap, like I always do; played the human doormat, the total loser...like I always do.

Sulking, I turned away from the bus—and was gripped by what I saw: my shadow, cast onto the sidewalk beside me, was not portraying my slack posture and hung head; instead, it was gesticulating wildly, pointing up into the bus, shaking a fist. Then, to my astonishment, it appeared to get back on the bus!

Wide-eyed, I turned back to the bus just as the doors closed in my face. The brakes hissed and the engine roared, and in the big side-view mirror I could see the driver chuckling and shaking his head as he pulled off into traffic.

When I looked back down, my shadow was just lying there, motionless—once again the silhouette of a spineless loser.

And again, I figured I was just seeing things—or losing it altogether—so I shrugged it off, and walked to work. If anything, the scolding I got for being late to work helped me forget all about what had happened on the way.

Until the next day, that is...

That day, during my lunch break, the girl at the food truck shorted me a dollar in my change. As usual, I didn't wanna say anything; was just gonna walk away. Keep my mouth shut, like I always do. Take the hit, like I always do.

After all, it's easier that way...

But when I turned to leave, what I saw stopped me in my tracks: my shadow, cast onto the street before me, was again gesticulating wildly. As I watched, another shadow—one that appeared to be that of a large, fat man—approached from the side and stood there, arms crossed.

I turned back to the truck: the girl was walking away from the register, and nobody else was around. I turned back to the pavement just as the fat-man shadow appeared to open the cash register and hand a bill over to my shadow.

Confused, I slowly turned back to the truck: the owner—a large, fat man—had appeared from somewhere in back, and was instructing the girl to clean up around the soda dispenser. I looked back down: now my shadow was just lying on the street before me, hot dog in hand.

Feeling both embarrassed and mystified, I hurried away.

Walking back home after work, my mind returned to my previous idea that perhaps our shadows are really the ones in charge, the real entities, and that we are merely their puppets; that *they* lead *us* around, and not vice-versa. Sounded crazy, sure—but it would definitely explain what I'd been seeing lately.

As I walked along, grappling with these thoughts, my shadow once again sidled up beside me. This time I didn't mind; in fact, I was kinda glad. I enjoyed the company. I pretended not to notice, afraid if I looked over it would drop back behind me like it did last time.

I couldn't help but smile as we strolled along, side by side.

•

The next day was when the shit hit the fan.

After a hard night of drinking, I awoke (came-to is probably more accurate) and just lay for a moment, stretching and yawning. My body ached all over, and it felt good to just lay on the warm, soft mattress for awhile.

Then I rolled over, and happened to look at the clock on my nightstand. It was almost eleven—and I was supposed to be at work at ten!

I threw the covers off, knowing I was in deep shit.

Late again. *Fuck.*

Why didn't someone call? I thought, yanking my cell phone up from the nightstand to check.

Black screen. Dead battery. *Shit.*

I pulled on some clothes, grabbed a handful of change from the jar, stuffed it into my pocket, took off for the bus stop.

That's when another odd thing happened: as I hurried toward the bus stop on Morris Street, a young black man was walking ahead of me. He was really tall, and dressed in what looked practically like rags. I wondered if he was homeless.

As he walked, he kept glancing back at me, as if he was suspicious of me, or maybe I should be of him. And as I gained on him, and he kept turning and looking at me, I noticed my shadow sidling up beside me again, almost in a protective manner.

The man stopped beside the bus stop shelter. Standing in the shade of a huge Acacia tree that had grown between the sidewalk and the eight-foot stucco wall running behind the shelter—the security wall for Longwood Estates, a fairly well-to-do neighborhood—he just stared at me as I approached.

By now my shadow had taken the lead, and I was nearing the bus stop, so I slowed to a walk, looking down at my shadow for a moment, watching it, wondering what it would do.

But suddenly, it snapped back in behind me.

I looked up, and the man was gone. Glancing all around, I didn't see him anywhere; not across the street, not down the walk, not sitting on the bench under the shelter, nowhere.

As I spun all around looking for him, perplexed, I heard a tapping sound above me, and looked up in time to see a lower branch of that big Acacia tree rocking up and down, knocking against the top of the wall—then slowly ease to a stop.

As I looked up at that swaying branch, wondering, the bus came around the corner, diesel engine roaring, yellow lights flashing, air brakes hissing as it pulled over.

Shrugging, I got on the bus and went on to work.

•

"Don't bother clocking in." Frank didn't even look up from the paperwork strewn all over his desk as he spoke. A cigarette burned in the ashtray in front of him, a thin column of smoke spiraling upward.

With any luck, maybe I could talk my way out of this.

"Come on, Frank. I just—"

"I don't want to hear it, Jeff." He finally looked up, tossing his pen roughly onto the desk for emphasis. His old desk chair squeaked as he leaned back, put both hands behind his head, and peered at me over his bifocals. He was a big man, stocky, gray crew cut. Tattoos along both muscular arms.

"I don't care what your excuse is. I don't care if the bus was late or you got kicked off again or traffic was bad or how hot it is out or that it's raining or snowing or whatever the fuck it is this time."

"Look, I'm sorry, okay? It's just that—"

"No, you're not *sorry*...what you are is *fired*."

"Just let me clock in and get to work."

I slid my timecard out of the rack on the wall, and motioned toward the old mechanical punch clock below.

"No."

"Come on, it's just an hour!"

"An hour and fifty-two minutes, to be exact."

"Whatever. Just let me—"

"Damn it, Benton! I lost Jamison today!"

He stood up and walked around his desk, approaching me.

"Know who Jamison is?" he asked.

"The Jag?" I nearly whispered, as I slid my timecard back into the rack.

"The Jag. The BMW. The Hummer. The couple of SUV's. Our best customer!" Frank then pointed his stocky finger at me. "*You* weren't here this morning, Benton. Jamison *was*."

He turned and walked over to the big observation window in the side wall of his office, looking out at the rest of his small crew spraying and scrubbing and toweling.

Without turning to me, he said, "Fucking Nina didn't show up, either, so that fat bitch is fired too."

"Nina called in?" I asked. She was one of the newbies in on the program, and I couldn't believe she was already fucking up.

"No call, no show."

Then he turned to me, glaring with anger. His eyes looked huge through the thick glasses as he started yelling.

"Jamison couldn't wait, and we were all backed up because **SOME** of my people don't bother to show up for work when they're **SCHEDULED!**"

"Why didn't you cut him in?" I asked, perplexed. We had a way of moving the vehicles around, re-ordering them, without the customers really noticing, so whenever a VIP came in or maybe someone was getting pissed and we needed to get them through, we *cut them in*, and nobody ever seemed to notice.

Frank put his fists on his hips.

"Why didn't you cut him in?" he parroted in a high, squeaky voice, bobbing his his head back and forth sarcastically.

I could do nothing but sulk, dropping my gaze to the floor.

"Don't you think I thought of that, Mr. Goddam Genius?" he bel-lowed. "I'da loved to bump someone and cut Jamison in, if I coulda—but all the bays were already full, so there was nowhere to cut him in *to*. After all, it is Saturday."

I nodded, still looking at the floor. Saturday is the busiest day for Frank's...a nice day to pick to be late. Real nice.

"He got pissed, and left. Burned rubber out the goddam parking lot!" He was glaring at me, but pointing out the big window at the busy parking lot, his USMC tattoo prominently displayed on his forearm.

"I doubt he'll be back, and I don't blame him. *I* wouldn't be."

He walked back to his desk and snatched up a handful of papers, crumpled them in his fist, and thrust them out in my direction.

"I ran the numbers while you were....*away*," he said in a sarcastic tone. "Over three grand a year. That's what he spends here. Or *used* to." With that, he tossed the papers into the air, and they drifted this way and that, finally settling on the dirty white tile floor. The entire time it took for the papers to float around the room and drift to the floor, Frank never took his eyes off me.

Finally, he walked back around his desk, sat down, picked up his pen, and began writing something. And without looking up, he muttered:

"Gone. Just like that."

Then he looked up at me, his cold blue eyes piercing my very being, pointed his pen at me, and said, "And so are *you*."

I walked back home, steaming. I was screwed now—*really* screwed—and it was all Frank's fault. I wasn't even thinking about my job or how I would pay rent or what my probation officer was gonna say or how long it would take before I got picked up for probation violation. All I could think about was how to get back at that asshole for firing me for something so petty as being a little late on a Saturday morning.

Well excuse the fuck outta me!

No, I wanted revenge; and on my way home, I thought of a way I might be able to get it. But I needed to wait until later...

When the shadows were out...

•

Right before dusk, with the sun hanging in the sky just above the mountains and the shadows at their longest, I set back out to Frank's. I walked, so I could test my theory.

Sure enough, about halfway to Frank's, it happened. My shadow moved up beside me. Even better: as we walked along together, it seemed to move forward, and take the lead! Only slightly, mind you—but still, no question it was a little ahead of me. I got the distinct impression that it was *excited*—eager to get where we were going, do what needed to be done.

I smiled, and let it lead me the rest of the way to Frank's.

The car wash was already closed, but Frank was still inside, finishing the paperwork. He always backed his truck into a reserved space behind the building, so he could set the alarm and leave out the back door of the office.

I waited behind his truck, sitting on the parking block in front of the next space. He wouldn't be able to see me until he got close.

As I sat there, my shadow kept getting up, pacing nervously around, and sitting back down. Ignoring it, I looked up at the sun, which was moving ever lower into the horizon, and hoped Frank came out before it went behind the mountains and I lost my shadow.

About the time I was wondering that, I heard the back door open and close, keys jingling. Then the sound of hard-soled shoes clicking toward me on the asphalt.

His shadow reached us long before he did. As he was approaching the driver's door, his shadow appeared around the front of the truck, then stopped as he fumbled with his keys. I stayed put, and my shadow moved forward to meet his.

I watched as his shadow suddenly stiffened. Before it had a chance to even move, my shadow went to work.

After the beating—which was quick, but brutal, relentless—we walked away together in silence.

I wondered if he would live.

I didn't much care.

And then I had an even better idea...

•

Next afternoon, I set out. A little earlier this time, because I was in for a long walk. Toward evening, sweat ran from my forehead as I dodged the potholes in an old, weed-lined street, finally stopping in front of what was once a gravel drive, now mostly just dirt and weeds and tire ruts.

As I stood, my shadow stretched out before me, waiting.

The rusty mailbox still said JOHN BENTON, the house was still filthy and paint-flaked, the yard still unkempt.

When I climbed the steps up to the front porch, I wasn't surprised that the doorbell was still broken, too. Just two rusty wires sticking out of a hole in the doorframe. It'd been that way for as long as I could remember.

I knocked on the rotted screen door, stood back, and waited.

Finally, he came to the door, creaked it open, and stepped out on the porch in front of me: unshaven, shirtless, cigarette in one hand, bottle in the other.

We stood staring at each other, eyes locked in some kind of mental standoff. We didn't move, didn't speak; just the whisk of dried leaves swirling about on the steps below, as I looked up at him, him down at me. Here I was fully grown now—and he was still taller than me, bigger.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw it: down below, on the dirt walkway that ran between the driveway and the porch, our shadows grappled; slowly, his collapsed to its knees, the hands of mine clasped firmly around its neck. Finally, his fell to the ground and lay motionless,

and mine stood.

It was finished.

Without a word, I followed my shadow away.

•

It got dark out long before I made it home, and I was getting a little scared walking alone in the darkness, in a strange area of town, with my shadow nowhere to be seen.

Walking along a particularly empty street running in front of a small retail plaza, I quickened my pace when I noticed a cluster of homeless people sitting around drinking and smoking in front of the dumpster at the side of the building.

I could feel them all peering at me from the darkness as I hurried by, their tiny glowing tips arcing back and forth and randomly brightening, like orange fireflies floating in the night.

As I traversed the front of the plaza, all the storefronts were dark, everything closed up for the night. The entire complex looked spooky, like a ghost town or something, and I wanted to get past it and on my way home as quickly as I could.

But just as I was reaching the halfway point, someone burst out of one of the darkened doors up ahead of me. I slowed, keeping an eye on the guy as he staggering toward his car, apparently drunk. Not wanting to risk tangling with a drunk—especially without my shadow around to help out—I stopped under the cover of a small Japanese Maple and watched from the darkness, half-concealed behind a light pole.

Stumbling down to the street, he flopped himself over the hood of his car—a nice-looking new Camaro, candy-apple red—and puked all over it.

After dropping his keys several times, he finally made it into his car, then proceeded to back into the light pole behind him, shattering a taillight. Then he punched it, burning rubber as he swerved out onto the street, meandering all over the road as he headed in the direction of the highway.

I couldn't help but wonder if he would make it home alive.

I waited for a moment, and when the car was finally out of sight, I took a deep breath, lowered my head to start out again—and that's when I noticed it.

The streetlight above was casting shadows all about, and the shadow of the Japanese Maple next to me fell behind me, away from the light pole, just as it should; but *my* shadow was *beside* me, just over my shoulder, standing there with its arms crossed over its chest.

Like it had my back.

With a smile, I realized: my shadow was there for me, even at night, when I couldn't always see it.

Knowing this, I strolled confidently home, detouring this way and that toward streetlights, porch lights, billboard lights, landscaping lights—any substantial source of light I could find—just to check, to test my theory.

And sure enough—my faithful shadow was always there.

Late that night, when I finally got home, I flopped myself happily into bed, knowing that I would never again walk alone.

I was now confident that even though I couldn't always see it, my shadow would always be there to protect me, to handle things for me, to help me out when I wasn't feeling quite up to the challenge of...well, life.

Smiling and content, sleep swept over me.

•

Now, wherever I go, my shadow takes the lead, and I just follow; it always knows where to go, what to do, how to handle things. And it does a much better job than I ever did—I was always afraid to stand up for myself, to demand what I deserve, to command respect.

My shadow, on the other hand, has no problem with any of that. And that's cool with me, too—I just watch from behind, awestruck and envious, as it handles everything for me.

But one day, after tagging along behind for weeks, watching my shadow handle everything for me, I got to wondering: just how much

control—if any—do I still have over my own life?

Later that day, I found out.

The sun was setting in the west, but the heat stuck around, and I was starting to get tired and a little winded. My shadow, on the other hand, didn't seem adversely affected, marching purposely ahead unabated. Soon I found myself falling further and further behind, struggling to keep up, stretching my legs out in longer and longer strides just to cover the same distance it was covering with a casual stroll.

Oddly, I began to feel light-headed, and chilled—even in the desert heat. Trying to concentrate, I just focused on the ground rushing beneath me. That's when I noticed a blue hue ahead of me, and looked up: my shadow had, at some point, turned blue! And then, even as I watched in astonishment—its upper half began to again change from this strange new blue, turning lighter, lighter...until suddenly, it turned green!

The blue and green colors my shadow now donned looked vaguely familiar...then, I knew what it was. I glanced down at myself as I hurried along: the blue jeans and green shirt I had been wearing that day were now just plain, colorless shades of gray, like I was a character in an old black-and-white movie!

I felt increasingly colder, more distant—and then it dawned on me that these sensations felt...*good*.

Pretty *damn* good, actually.

Everything felt surreal, painless; intoxicating.

Numb.

So I began to slow.

I no longer had the energy to keep up with my shadow; no longer had any desire to take the lead, to be in charge. I sensed that I could give it all up—right here, right now—if I wanted to.

Somehow, I knew that all I had to do was *let go*.

And that if I did, I'd no longer have to struggle; I'd never again be pushed around, taken advantage of, play the fool, be a loser; I'd no longer

need to worry about violating my probation, or how much trouble I'll be in if I got caught.

And best of all: I'd never again have to be anybody's *bitch*.

With sudden clarity and lightness of heart—and a spiritual enlightenment that afforded a sense of relief and contentment the likes of which I have never before known—I let go.

The quietus was painless; liberating.

Total tranquility engulfed me as I lay back, dissolving into a translucent darkness.

Smiling, I watched as my shadow raced eagerly ahead of me, gradually solidifying into vivid, living colors.

Now, with all that weight off me, it's easier to keep up.

And I am no longer afraid.

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