

Mr. Void

“Alright Anthony let’s put yourself together. We have a big night ahead of us tonight and can’t go out looking like a maniac,” he spoke to his reflection in the mirror. “New bowling league and new friends. There won’t be any more insults or name-calling, it’s time for a fresh start! Goodbye high school assholes, hello future friends!” Anthony laughed hard as he gave himself a pep talk. Finally feeling like there could be a clean slate, tonight would be his chance to make some friends. There wasn’t a better feeling than this, and he knew that he would make a good first impression. Nothing was going to ruin his mood or excitement about tonight.

School years were some of the toughest times for Anthony growing up. Grade school through middle school, Anthony never played any sports, joined any clubs, or participated in any other function where he would have been able to develop some form of social interaction and make some friends. Instead, Anthony stayed home working on his many little projects; organic gardening, building electronic cars, painting murals, and attempting to find his Italian roots through cooking. None of these after school activities helped Anthony in his quest to make friends, being referred to as the “foster kid” didn’t help either.

Attending Trinton High School was not a positive experience for him. Trinton was a smaller school where everyone knew each other from the small city it resided in. This small populated city, had formed some very brutal cliques that had not been too kind to Anthony, the foster kid that never fit in. The only positive interactions he shared with others was when they needed some help with homework or tests. Most of his experiences with other classmates involved being called names, shoved into lockers and trash bins, or the occasional wad of gum tossed into his hair. The worst of the bullying came from a boy named Jack Wolfe, a star athlete who was the

most popular kid in school. Jack's cruelty had no bounds and was fueled by his desire to impress his friends, and came by means of "wedgies", where his underwear was painfully yanked up to his shoulders, and "swirlies" where his head was stuffed into a toilet bowl and flushed, not always clean toilets either.

With his long brown hair pulled tightly back and tied into a neat bun, Anthony ran his hands over his hair that were coated with a greasy hair product to give his hair a shiny and smooth look. Nodding to his reflection, he left the bathroom to finish getting ready for the big bowling league night. He wore his new shirt that he got earlier that day from the local thrift store, a crimson red collared shirt that had half of a small stitched alligator on the upper breast corner. The leather curled away from the steel toe like old wallpaper where the glue gave way to time and the wallpaper split and began to roll up, unveiling the ugly wall it was meant to keep covered. His favorite pair of jeans that were a size and a half too large paired well with his boots. This type of wardrobe has been the staple of Anthony's fashion for several years, always the old boots and baggy jeans. The only accessory that Anthony included to complete this designer look was an old leather belt and one of those utility tools that he kept in a pouch that looped on to his belt.

"Damnit!!" Anthony growled and cursed as he realized he was about to walk out the door without his new bowling ball. "Get your shit together!" Quickly, he threw open the closet door and pulled out an old navy-blue bowling bag with grey nylon handles, purchased the same day with the bowling ball as a package deal for ten dollars. He had bought the used bowling ball from a thrift store that he often visited when he was on the hunt for items that he would never be able to afford brand new. The previous owner of the bowling ball must have had long and skinny fingers because Anthony had to aggressively force his fat sausage fingers into the holes just to be able to grip the ball with one hand. When Anthony opened the bowling ball bag and saw the flat

grey colored ball in there with the personalized inscription “Mr. Void” in block letters just above the top two finger holes he felt a strange connection and needed to have it. The name inscribed didn’t exactly mean anything directly to Anthony, but he felt that a name like “Mr. Void” was confident and held some type of authority that Anthony was drawn to.

The bowling bag was placed by the door to his apartment and Anthony made one last trip to the bathroom. “No excuses. No negativity. No free passes. No problem!” Anthony recited this mantra to his reflection in the mirror daily before leaving to help focus on a positive mental attitude. He ended each mantra with slapping his face a couple times on each cheek like a boxer pumping themselves up before a title bout. When the mantra and slapping was over, Anthony would lean over the sink and get really close to the mirror and whisper, “let’s have some fucking fun,” and wink to himself. The wink always made him laugh because his eyes were magnified by his thick prescription lensed glasses which reminded him of the way funhouse mirrors would distort a person’s body or features and make them look like cartoon characters.

“And we’re outta here folks,” he said as he locked the door to his apartment, a small one-bedroom unit in a low-income apartment complex and walked a short distance to the corner where he would take the city bus four miles to the bowling alley.

Climbing on to the bus where there were just a handful of passengers, he sat down in front near the doors as he usually did, putting his bowling bag in between his legs on the floor. As the bus drove away, his decrepit apartment complex shrinking in the distance, Anthony began to feel the excitement of meeting new people begin to change to anxiousness and worry. He had never really fit in socially with others in the past, and even though this time would be different because the members on his new bowling team wouldn’t know him, he still couldn’t shake the old thoughts about how it was something about him that drove people away, like a curse. *Maybe they*

just think I'm weird and ugly..., but Anthony knew that it wasn't that, it was the immature insufferable children he had grown up with that never gave him a chance... *Fuck'em*. Bowling tonight was going to be his chance. A chance to be accepted for who he is, a chance to meet new people, nicer people.

"Move over fat boy," came a voice over Anthony's shoulder that interrupted his thoughts.

"What?" Anthony looked behind him at all the empty seats and wondered why this man dressed in mechanic's clothes was asking him to move.

"I said, MOVE OVER." The tone from the man stung and was met with a fire in his eyes and a cocky grin on his face. It hurt Anthony's neck craning to look up at this man standing over him with hostility painted on his face. "Don't play with me, MOVE!"

Anthony hesitated at first but moved over to the seat by the window as the man plopped down in Anthony's old seat. The heat in Anthony's face rose and his glasses filled with steam as he struggled to contain his emotions. His eyes were beginning to water as he looked out the window, hiding them from his new neighbor. Everything in his body was tense, his stomach was in knots and he felt his hands tightly clenched into fists leaving small crescent moons on his palms from his nails. *Kill him*, came a quiet voice that spoke in his mind, but it wasn't his and suddenly Anthony forgot about holding his composure. The quiet voice only spoke once and Anthony began to wonder if he had really heard it at all when suddenly, he felt a strange impulse, a pull, to open his bowling bag. Just as he was about to bend down and open the bag, he caught a glimpse of the bowling alley marquee in the distance and instead cradled the bowling bag between his feet.

The bus stopped a half a block away from the bowling alley and Anthony, with his new bowling ball bag in tow, stumbled off clumsily as he grappled internally with his nervousness. He was the only one to depart from the bus, so he stood there for a moment on the sidewalk looking in the direction of the bowling alley taking deep breaths to calm his nerves. Not far ahead Anthony could see the awnings of the bowling alley, light green with thick black lettering, beckoning him to come. One final deep breath Anthony whispered to himself, “c’mon asshole, everything will be fine.”

“PINEY LANES – Saturday night mixed teams league starts tonight!” The Piney Lanes had a small marquee that faced the busy intersection and would always promote their daily or weekly schedule and specials. Doing some research and asking around about the place gave him hope and showed some real promise that this venue was the right place to make some new friends. Piney Lanes wasn’t a large alley as it only had 16 lanes, but during the league season there was plenty of people and the reviews online were all positive. Anthony had found this bowling alley one day when he drifted off to sleep on the bus and had missed his stop at his apartment complex. That day when he woke up on the bus after missing his stop, the marquee outside of Piney Lanes was promoting the league that he had now joined.

A SUV with tinted windows sped by honking its horn startling Anthony out of his memory and making him jump. “Fucking idiots,” he growled as he exhaled slowly. The SUV looked eerily like the one that Jack Wolfe drove back in high school. The same Jack that was at the helm of all those wedgies and swirlies.

The heat from his face, as his anger built, steamed his glasses up lightly and forced Anthony to wipe them off. *What if it’s him? I can’t go in there if it is.* Thinking that maybe this bowling idea wasn’t a good one, Anthony contemplated leaving, but after taking a few deep breaths he

regained his composure. All the neglect from his childhood and the relentless torment from the kids in his high school fueled his anger. The only way he was able to control his anger, his rage, was by swallowing it and burying it deep within. It wasn't always easy to suppress his feelings and was getting more difficult over time. Anthony looked down to the bowling ball bag he had in his hand and had an urge to open it up, like it was calling to him.

Slowly, he set the bag on the ground and unzipped the bag. Rolling the bowling ball around he stopped it when the inscription showed. "Mr. Void," he read aloud to himself. "I, am Mr. Void." There was a strange calming effect that washed over Anthony as he said this to himself. It was as if by claiming the title and name Anthony now was filled with confidence and all his nervousness and worry were calmed. "Let's set 'em up and knock 'em down," he said and barked a laugh at the unintended bowling pun he had just used. With his chin out and his shoulders back, Anthony went inside the bowling alley with a new-found confidence.

The bowling alley was just as it appeared online. It was small but nice in a warm intimate way. There were only a few people scattered around on a few lanes getting ready for the rest of their team to arrive. Anthony went to the front desk and was warmly greeted by James, a big fellow with a kind face who directed him to the lane he and his team would be bowling on. "Lane thirteen and looks like no one from your team is here yet, because you're a little early but they should be here in about a half hour or so. You'll have a good time with them, I know them from last season." James pointed to the lane with a big smile. Anthony thanked him and went to his assigned lane feeling positive and upbeat about tonight.

Pulling out Mr. Void from the bag, Anthony felt a surge of excitement and energy like a kid racing down the stairs to open presents on Christmas morning. He couldn't wait to meet his team and have some fun. Holding Mr. Void in his hands made him feel secure, made him feel safe, he

didn't even notice that he had been staring at the ball in his hands the entire time. Lost in the smooth metallic grey and running his fingers gently over the block letter inscription slowly.

“YO, TONY!!” A distinct loud voice rang through the bowling alley. There was only one person who used to say that phrase and call Anthony by that name, the guy who tormented Anthony all through high school, Jack Wolfe.

“What are you guys doing here?” Anthony looked up at Jack as he paraded through the alley to a lane twelve, right next to him. The other three faces that followed in Jack's wake like little ducklings were the same faces from school that were always cheering Jack on as he beat on Anthony in one ugly form or another.

“You don't own this place, dumbass. We joined a couple weeks ago but didn't know they let fat little freaks like you in here.” Jack laughed and was echoed by his puppet friends. Jack continued with the insults and reminisced about all the “fun and cool” things he did to Anthony back in school with his friends.

The rage that Anthony instantly felt was overwhelming. His glasses were fogged over from the heat, fists kept clenching and unclenching, and he felt his muscles beginning to twitch. This was supposed to be his clean slate, to start over with new people and make some friends. All of it was extinguished as he continued to listen to the verbal onslaught from Jack in the background. He was losing control.

Kill him. Kill Him. Kill, Kill... The thought rang in Anthony's mind and became louder and faster. It was a strong and overwhelming voice that spoke to him. Anthony looked down at Mr. Void in his hands and nodded. *I am Mr. Void.*

Anthony put the ball back in to the bag and looked for Jack. He caught a glance of Jack walking towards the bathroom and quickly followed. *Kill him, kill, kill, kill...* the voice demanded. As Anthony turned the corner into the bathroom, he pulled his utility knife from its sheath on his belt and thumbed the blade out in one fluid motion. Jack's back was facing Anthony as he stood in front of the urinal and in one swinging motion Anthony plunged the blade of his utility knife into Jack's temple. Jack's body went rigid and then collapsed to the ground with a sickening thump. Looking at the blood on the blade of the knife with eyes that were empty and cold, *Kill yourself, kill yourself, kill, kill...* the voice continued its desire and Anthony moved the blade of his knife, in a slow mechanical motion, up to his own throat and pulled it across.

"Welcome to Thrift USA," the lady at the checkout said with a smile to the young man. "Did you find everything you were looking for?"

"Yes. I think I found a gem!" The young man placed an old navy-blue bowling bag with grey nylon handles on to the counter. "I don't know what it is about this bowling ball, but as soon as I saw it, I knew I needed to have it." The young man shrugged his shoulders and returned the smile.

Sally, the lady working the register opened the bowling ball bag and peered in. "Mr. Void?" She giggled and shook her head with raised eyebrows. "Well, this bowling ball always seems to find it's way back here." When she saw the confused expression on the young man she said, "I've worked here for six months and have seen this ball pass through here three different times."