

"Does Anyone Really Know Anything?"

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While Charlie waited for Sam in the darkest corner of the bedroom he reflected on an occupational predicament. A week into his assignment at the townhouse, having already found the lowest of lows in life by dying, as a ghost Charlie faced a new level of failure when unable to scare Sam even the slightest.

"It is not unprecedented," said the Society Officer who represented the ghost community and appeared in the attic unannounced. The ghost official went on to express how the situation though did seem "peculiar" since Charlie very much looked scary.

Charlie died with a quarter (lengthwise) of his body in shreds, caught up in a large industrial machine designed to break apart steel. While the machine was working towards it, this wasn't what had killed him. Deep scratch marks from finger nails on his throat and eyes swollen all from shellfish in a mac and cheese dish his coworker brought. The deathly allergic reaction, causing him to scrape for air and run for an EpiPen, while in the act of doing so this was not what killed him. Rocking back and forth the entire building, what caused Charlie to trip into the shredding machine, was a significant earthquake (8.8). Debris fell from the ceiling. One large beam in particular landed on top of Charlie's head, crushing his skull and indeed killing him. Considering these three assaults, as a ghost Charlie was scary looking.

The Society Officer gave a long speech about how appearance will only get you so far, there was haunting craft and method to consider. The speech concluded with the point that if there was no haunting whatsoever a ghost was just a ghost. While a bit divided, most of the ghost community felt that this didn't feel right. We all have responsibilities and tomorrow night is your last chance to fulfill them.

Having a natural distrust for authority and a skepticism of "best practice," Charlie was annoyed because he felt that previously the Officer probably only used his looks to haunt the living.

The Officer himself looked rather scary. Having died a long time ago he had no legs below the knee, both were severed right off when a donkey drawn cart tipped over and fell onto him. His feet, still in the shoes worn the day he passed, followed his floating body everywhere, be it a few steps behind on the ground. The cart wasn't what killed him. It was the kick to the face from a panicked donkey attached to the sideways cart that did him in. Charlie figured that over time the ghost probably learned to sound academic enough on the subject and landed this cushy post as an authority figure.

Charlie asked the Officer what would happen if he again was unable to scare Sam?

This is where things went pretty bad between the two of them. The Officer gave a simple response, "you'll be cast out into a multi-dimensional nothingness." To which Charlie asked what that was exactly? The Officer paused and said he didn't feel like any detail was needed. He asked Charlie to agree with him that the name alone sounded scary enough.

"No," Charlie shot back. "If you can't tell me what it is then it doesn't sound that scary."

Their conversation went back and forth with the Officer eventually sharing the few facts he knew about the nothingness. Which Charlie belittled asking “how bad can it really be?”

The Officer began to speculate beyond what he knew on how bad it really could be. Charlie though remained unfazed and even started to question the Society Officer’s credentials since he couldn’t fully answer the question. This is when the Officer threw up his hands out of frustration and yelled “does anyone really know anything?” before storming out of the attic. His feet as a tail.

Even though they had been at odds Charlie enjoyed his time with the Society Officer. Since becoming a ghost his days were less social and he was always cold. His only other interaction with another soul (living or not) had been his failed attempts to scare Sam.

Standing in their kitchen he delivered a frightening speech (the crux of it was eating Sam’s soul) to the young living man. Sam stared back at the ghost with a goofy look on his face. It remained unchanged and never turned to fear. Instead he started to laugh at Charlie while rummaging through the refrigerator, stopping only after he found one of those cocktail’s-in-a-can and took a long sip. Sam burped, grabbed a bag of chips and stumbled into the wall as he turned back to the living room. There Sam passed out on the couch, drink slipping out of his hand and a stream of liquid pooled on the floor around empty cocktail-in-a-can can’s.

A few nights ago was just as fruitless.

Hearing the front door close and footsteps approaching, Charlie sprung forth out of the closet. Ghost arms extended several inches farther than they could have stretched as a human, jaw dropped several more inches than when alive, all while he let out a terrifying scream.

Surprised, Sam had been caught in the motion of reaching for his shoes, he looked Charlie up and down, “Hey, finally a reason to use that spare key, eh?”

Confused, Charlie felt self-conscious standing there, arms still outstretched and jaw dropped with none of the desired reception.

Sam slipped both shoes off and, while softly singing, again went to the kitchen.

“Oh, baby, I’m losing my mind, just little. Meet me in...in the middle!” Sam’s head inserted into the open fridge. “The middle!” It popped back out, hard seltzer now in hand. “You want anythin’ terr drink, Brian?”

Brian was the name of Sam’s neighbor, Charlie remembered from the initial report on the man.

“In the middle! Hey, who sang that?” Sam slammed the door shut. “Boy, am I drunk. Alexa, play with the middle!” Sam did not own an Alexa.

Now in the darkest corner of the bedroom, dark even with the overhead light turned on, Charlie waited. The young man was late. It was a minute or two past 10:15pm when there was a sound, a sort of knock, somewhere within the residency.

After a period of dead silence the knocking started again and stayed consistent, it came from just down the hallway and drew closer. For the first time in a while Charlie felt, if he recalled correctly, fear. He started to shrink back into the corner, his ghost form hiding partially in the wall itself when into the bedroom walked Sam.

Charlie let out a shriek at the suddenness and look of his appearance. Turning towards the corner was a figure that resembled Sam, same polo and slacks he wore that morning, only now a distinct glow around him and he appeared partially transparent. His body was battered with cuts on both arms and his shoulder misaligned. His face looked like a cast iron skillet had been swung against it. "It, weird, right? Like it feels weird but at the same time, feel nothing at all. You too think'n idea to have a scotch, and then wine at dinner—then two more scotch. Drive home and that tree on Jasmine street, uh yeah the big one, you too think it was going to move out of the way?"

It took a moment but the reality of what had happened that night finally broke in Charlie's mind. "We can watch TV still, right? Watch Die hard? Just feels right" Sam floated down the hall, in his hand a beer bottle that occasionally bumped against the wall. Charlie followed not too far behind.

In the living room Sam batted at a remote on the coffee table. He was still learning how, as a ghost, to interact with physical objects, "welcome to the party, buddy! Or, is it pal? I think it's pal. Yeah, it's 'pal'."

Charlie watched while wondering what exactly the Society Officer would have to say about this development. He was now more concerned about the "multi-dimensional nothingness."

Charlie tried to remember all that was mentioned about the place. Not being able to remember much, he wished he had been less of a jerk and paid more attention.