

**And Was  
It All A  
Dream?**

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Click. Click. Jackson tapped away at his computer. Click. Click. It wasn't that he was unhappy with his job. No. He was paid well; in a respectable job. Nothing to complain about. Click. Click. He stood up. Staring at his computer screen, Jackson had this feeling of being lost in a herd of sheep. He grabbed his coat and headed out his office door. Ignoring the stares of his colleagues he walked through the office and out into the street.

What was it all about, really? He had grown up, gone to school, and begun working all in the same part of the city. His daily routine hadn't differed. Still contemplating his life, Jackson did not notice the gradual change in his surroundings. By the time he actually looked around, he was completely lost. But something else didn't seem right either. The buildings around Jackson were dilapidated and the people Jackson saw were all in worn-out clothes, shuffling along. After a while, they seemed to register his presence, in his affluent clothes and professional appearance. A sort of crowd started to gather in front of him, murmuring at his being there. For a time, Jackson just stood there, confused by this unfamiliar setting and the people here. Then someone in the crowd threw a rock at him. Inspired by their audacity, the crowd all proceeded to throw things, while screaming and cursing.

Jackson, confused but realising how badly he was outnumbered, ran back in the direction he had come. The crowd made no move to follow him but their glares seemed to pursue him as he dashed away. When he had run far enough he paused, gasping as he sucked in air. This seemed the most exercise he had done in his life. Glancing around, he saw a familiar street, with its immaculate guise. Jackson turned and strode off in the direction of his flat.

When he arrived at home, Jackson opened the door and fell down onto his couch. He didn't understand. Why had he never been into that part of town before? And why was it so run-down. Questions revolved around in his mind. Confused and exhausted, he walked to his bedroom and resolved to find an answer tomorrow.

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As Jackson entered his office door, he felt his mind suddenly drift awake. Why was he at work? Mystified, the first thing he saw was his boss' door and last night's resolution came back to him. He marched into his boss' office and shut the door behind him.

"Sir, there's something I have to tell you," he began.

"Ok, Simmons. Sit down and tell me then," said his boss.

"I feel like I've been living in a dream my whole life. There's something missing. Just last night, I suddenly felt dissatisfied. So I left work and just walked." Jackson shrugged his shoulder, feeling slightly at a loss to explain himself. His boss nodded for him to continue.

"So as I was walking I...found myself in an entirely different part of the city. The buildings were all old and half-destroyed. And the people. They were dishevelled and depressed. They seemed like they were poor." This concept, though Jackson knew of it, was alien to his mind. "And when they noticed me, they cursed and threw rocks. What is happening? Is it just me or is something going on?" His boss frowned and seemed to pause and consider his words.

"This is serious. Come into my study and we can discuss it further." He stood up and Jackson followed suit. "Please, through here." He pointed to a hitherto unknown door to Jackson. Jackson nodded seriously and moved to the door and grabbed the handle. Thud! He fell to the floor when his boss hit him over the head. The boss methodically hid the cudgel in his desk and then dragged the body into the study.

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Jackson woke up to find himself staring at a blue sky for what seemed the first time in his life. In the city it had always appeared to be overcast. He rose to find himself sitting on a balcony, in what looked like a country villa. As he looked across the balcony, he caught sight of his boss, though he was in more casual clothes now and smoking a cigar.

"Ah, Jackson. I see you're awake. Good, there's something I want to discuss with you. Cigar?" asked his boss in a warm tone. Jackson shook his head without speaking, unsure of himself. "By the way, my name is Nigel." This caught Jackson off guard. He realised that though he had worked for this man for ten years and never known his name.

"All right then." Nigel stopped to gather his thoughts "Look, there is a lot I could explain to you, but it would take time, so let's keep it simple." His smile was genial and his tone friendly. Jackson nodded at him to continue. "Okay, so basically you haven't been completely awake for most of your life. And even if you had been, it would have been pretty boring. So I'm here to make you an offer." He paused "I am actually a member of the government inner circle which runs the city. It's a more exciting job. I guarantee you'd have more fun." His smile was dazzling. Jackson could realise what a charismatic man this was before him. And dangerous. He had completely changed his personality from before. Jackson looked out across the country.

"A change of job? Why not? Fine." He said. From the corner of his eye he could see Nigel's smile grow bigger. And just hear a whisper: "Another convert."