

THE ARTIFACT

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. YOZU'S NOODLE SHOP - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A red and white sign reading, YOZU'S, blazes above the entrance to a small, glass fronted eatery.

A sleek, black, luxury sedan rolls to a stop at the curb.

INT YOZU'S NOODLE SHOP - NIGHT

FREDDIE, a mop headed, twenty-something, man, sits alone at the end of the counter, hunched over a bowl of steaming noodles. Puffy, sleep deprived eyes, gaze unseeing into the bowl, as he mechanically shovels noodles into his mouth.

The few tables this joint offers are only half filled by dozy customers quietly filling their stomachs.

YOZU, the elderly Japanese proprietor, works behind the counter, cleaning up, preparing for the end of his shift.

BING BONG! The door sensor sounds, and in steps MR. ABLE, a handsome, raven haired gentleman, 40's, dressed in an immaculate suit, and wearing black leather gloves.

He is followed closely by two large, grim faced men, also wearing suits, with weapons in hand, who immediately go to work clearing the noodle shop of it's patrons; all except for Freddie.

Freddie is so engrossed in his meal that he doesn't bother to look up when the door chime sounds, he just keeps devouring his noodles. When he hears the SCUFFLE of chairs, and the SQUEAKING of sneakers on the floor as the other guests make a quick exit, he looks up and sees in the mirror behind the counter, two armed thugs standing behind him. He stands up looking scared and confused, ready to take flight.

When Mr. Able sits down on the stool next to him, he nearly jumps out of his skin.

Freddie takes a quick step to his left, hoping to rush out the back door, and stops dead when a third grim faced man (completing the set), steps in from the back, blocking his path.

MR. ABLE  
(cool as ice)  
Sit down Freddie.

(CONTINUED)

Freddie looks around the room looking for a way out, finding none, he looks over the counter at Yozu, hoping he will help. Yozu just shrugs his shoulders. This isn't his fight.

Freddie plops down on his stool, looking a little pale, and stares at the counter, not daring to look Mr. Able in the eye.

MR. ABLE  
(to Yozu)  
Sake please. Warm.

Yozu places a small porcelain cup on the counter in front of Mr. Able, and fills it to the top with sake. Mr. Able raises the cup in a salute to Yozu, swallows the sake in one gulp, and sets the cup back down on the counter. He waves away Yozu's attempt to refill the cup.

Yozu bows and leaves the room.

Mr. Able reaches into his inner jacket pocket, pulls out a small, silver box, and slaps it down on the counter in front of Freddie.

Freddie finally finds the courage to look up at Mr. Able.

MR. ABLE  
Open it up.

Hesitantly, Freddie does as he is told.

Inside of the box we see what looks to be a fractured piece of green stone, or maybe glass, that shimmers in the light, with glyphs etched into it's surface.

With shaking hands, Freddie quickly replaces the cover of the box, and pushes it away, and then wipes his hand on his shirt nervously.

MR. ABLE  
You know what that is?

FREDDIE  
Mr. Able, I didn't know...

MR. ABLE  
(interrupting)  
Stop! You didn't know? Hmm? What didn't you know?  
(pause)  
You didn't know that Roberto was my son?

Freddie stays quite. Mr. Able pulls the lid off the box, revealing the artifact once again (Is it glowing?), and slides it back in front of Freddie.

FREDDIE

Please Mr. Able. I didn't know what was going to happen.

MR. ABLE

You did. You knew.

Freddie is silent for a few seconds, and then...

FREDDIE

(in a rush)

I had to do it. My brother Danny came to me, begging for my help. He was so scared, and he was saying all kinds of crazy things. He showed me this thing, and he told me he had to get rid of it, or he was going to die. So I told him to throw it away, but he said he couldn't. He said he had to give it away. And...

MR. ABLE

And you knew exactly who to give it to, didn't you? Huh? My son.

FREDDIE

Mr. Able please...

Mr. Able slams his fist down on the counter, causing Freddie to jump.

MR. ABLE

My only son! My son, who thought you and your friends were so cool. Right? My son, who followed you around like a puppy. My son, who called you friend.

FREDDIE

We had to give it to somebody.

MR. ABLE

You should have given it to someone else.

FREDDIE

He's my brother. He said he was going to die.

MR. ABLE

You were trying to protect your brother. I can respect that. But, you made a mistake when you chose my son.

(beat)

And now you are going to pay for it.

FREDDIE

You can't make me take it.

MR. ABLE

(mocking)

I can't?

(chuckles softly)

You don't know me very well.

Mr. Able turns to Grim Faced Man 1 and nods. GFM 1 disappears out the front door.

For the few seconds he is gone, the noodle shop is silent, with Mr. Able staring down Freddie the entire time.

BING BONG! GFM 1 steps back into the shop, dragging a young man with him. The young man's hands are bound, his mouth is covered with duct tape, and his eyes are filled with terror. This is DANNY, Freddie's younger brother.

FREDDIE

Danny!

Danny's eyes widen when he sees his brother, and he tries to squirm out of GFM 1's iron grip, but it's no use.

MR. ABLE

In the short time this...thing has been in my life, I have learned very little about it. I reached out to everyone I know, and I know a lot of people, but, it seems that anyone with any knowledge about this thing, was either too afraid to speak to me, or were already dead.

(points to Freddie)

Except for you and your brother of course. I don't know where it came from; originally that is, what it's purpose is, or even what it's made of. Look...

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Able holds up his right hand so that Freddie can see it, and peels off the leather glove. His hand is cracked and blackened, like burnt wood. He flexes it into a fist a couple of times, and it sounds like ROCKS RUBBING TOGETHER.

MR. ABLE

(continued)

This is what happened when I tried to destroy that thing.

(as if to himself)

It still burns.

(his attention back on Freddie)

I tried so many things to save my son.

FREDDIE

Please just let me...

MR. ABLE

(interrupting)

Shut your mouth! You could have told him. You and your brother could have given him the ability to save himself. Why didn't you just tell him? I could have taken this burden from him.

Freddie just shakes his head.

MR. ABLE

You're right. I can't force this thing on you. But...I'm willing to bet I don't have to.

FREDDIE

You can't kill him.

MR. ABLE

There you go telling me what I can't do again.

FREDDIE

(defiant)

It won't make a difference. Even if you kill him, I won't accept it.

Danny thrashes in GFM 1's grip, and tries to yell something through the tape.

MR. ABLE

I'm not going to kill your brother Freddie.

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Able nods to Grim Faced Man 1 again. GFM 1 forces Danny onto his knees, and then pulls a huge, ugly knife out from under his jacket. He brings it up real close to Danny's face, and Danny freaks out.

FREDDIE

No!

Freddie stands up like he is going to attack, but he is frozen in place by fear, when he sees Grim Faced Man 2 and 3 point their guns at his head.

MR. ABLE

Until you pick that thing up, I am going to take your little brother apart, one piece at a time.

FREDDIE

Please don't.

MR. ABLE

(to GFM 1)

Start with his fingers

Grim Faced Man 1 goes straight to work, wrenching back one of Danny's pinky fingers.

Danny struggles with everything he has got, lunging and kicking, making it difficult for GFM 1 to keep hold of him.

GFM 1 throws him to the ground, kneels on Danny's chest, stopping him from moving, wrenches his finger back, and lops it off with one sickening swipe of the blade.

GFM 1 takes the severed finger and tosses it at Freddie's feet.

FREDDIE

Stop! Stop!

Mr. Able holds up his hand, stopping GFM 1 from taking anymore of Danny's digits. He points to the artifact lying on the counter.

MR. ABLE

Pick it up.

Freddie looks from his brother to Mr. Able, and then down at the artifact. For a moment he just stands there, staring and sweating.

(CONTINUED)

FREDDIE

I can't.

MR. ABLE

Another finger then.

FREDDIE

No!

Freddie stares at the artifact for a few seconds longer, and then, in one quick motion, like a cobra strike, he snatches it out of the box.

He stares at it laying in the palm of his hand (It definitely seems to be glowing now), open mouthed, not wanting to believe that any of this is real. He clenches the artifact in his fist, holds it tight to his chest, closes his eyes, and begins to sob.

MR. ABLE

Near the end, my son cried too. He kept telling me that he could hear them coming. "I can hear them dad. I can hear them coming.", he would say. And I would ask him, "Who son? Who is coming?", but he didn't know. All he knew was that, they, were coming for him. Coming to kill him. Coming to take him away. I tried to tell him that everything was going to be all right, but he knew that it was a lie. We both knew then that I couldn't protect him. He told me he was sorry. He told ME, that he was sorry. Then I cried too.

(takes a moment)

My son was a good boy. A good man, and you took him away from me. So here we are. Are you sorry now?

Freddie squeezes his eyes shut even tighter, trying to block out the world around him.

Suddenly, we can hear the sounds of dozens of clawed feet SCRABBLING across the pavement.

Freddie's eyes snap open, and he looks over his left shoulder, searching for something that isn't there. A second later, we hear the sound of scrabbling feet again. Freddie looks to his right, out the front windows of the noodle shop. Nothing.

(CONTINUED)



MR. ABLE

You can hear them now too. Can't you?

Freddie stares at him, shell shocked and speechless. He nods.

MR. ABLE

You don't have much time. You should run.

Freddie takes one last look at his brother bleeding on the floor, and then bolts out the back door.

MR. ABLE

(to GFM 3)

You make sure he never gets the opportunity to give that thing away. Wherever he goes, you go. Until it's over. Understand?

Grim Faced Man 3 nods his head.

MR. ABLE

Go.

Grim Faced Man 3 takes off in pursuit of Freddie.

GRIM FACED MAN 1

What do you want me to do with this one Mr. Able?

Mr. Able walks over, and kneels down next to where Danny lies crumpled on the floor. He gets up close, face to face.

MR. ABLE

(menacing)

You were the one who gave that thing to my son. You were the one who held out his hand, told him what a wonderful gift it was, and smiled as he took that cursed thing from you.

(pokes Danny in the chest)

Weren't you? You gave my son death as a gift, so that's the gift I give to you now.

Mr. Able stands up, and brushes the dust of the knees of his slacks. Danny's muffled pleas are lost on him.

(CONTINUED)

MR. ABLE

Take him out back, and cut his  
filthy, lying, coward head off.

Danny struggles so much that the tape comes away from his  
mouth just enough so that we can finally hear him scream.

DANNY

No! No! Please don't do this!  
Please! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm  
sorry!...

MR. ABLE

And make sure to dump the pieces in  
the garbage. I don't want to leave  
a mess for Yozu to clean up.

GRIM FACED MAN 1

Yes Mr. Able.

GFM 1 drags Danny, kicking and screaming, still begging for  
his life, out of the room.

Mr. Able pulls a few cash notes out of his pocket, and  
leaves them on the counter for Yozu. He grabs the silver box  
off of the counter, and heads for the door.

MR. ABLE

(to GFM 2)

Let's go.

Grim Faced Man 2 hustles to catch up, and get the door for  
Mr. Able.

A terrible scream rings out from the back alley, and is cut  
short.

FADE OUT