

Valkyrie

As usual, I awoke just before darkest night passed into gray, but today, something was different – something was gripping my heart, no – make that my mind. I'm a sci-fi writer, so I keep a yellow pad and a pencil (yeah, yeah – I know it's old-fashioned) on my nightstand. A lot of my most popular stories came from that pad, so I tried to classify / quantify my feeling of dread / remorse. Wait – was I feeling dread? Dread? Of what, I might ask? I fear no man!

"We know," replied a tiny voice, right into the center of my brain. "You're as brave and true as can be, but it's our time now – we've come for you."

I scribbled that line down – it would be a great story! Then, and only then, did I sit straight up. My wife was peacefully sleeping.

A different voice said "Yes, she's asleep – we're not here for her; we're here for you."

What the hell, over? "Who are you and why are you in my brain?"

High-pitched voices came into the 4 quadrants of my head:

"I'm *Off*."

"I'm *Out*."

"I'm *Night*."

"I'm *Snack*."

"We're *Pseudos*. We're here to eat you."

Now I've cooked up some pretty good sci-fi in my day, so I scribbled that introduction down before my guts turned ice-cold – what do you mean '*eat me*'?

"We eat the past."

"We thought you'd still be asleep."

"You're history, so now you're ours."

"No past, except we eat it. No present, it's too brief to have meaning. No future, it's undefined."

What a morbid thought – but I wrote it down. There were creatures in my brain (at least 4 of them), and they were here to eat me (I really didn't like the name '*Snack*').

"Well I don't particularly care for your name either," I heard. I never heard of *Pseudos*, so I didn't know what they were talking about.

Off said "He's supposed to be dead; we're behind schedule."

Out said "He's a hero; we can talk to him – after all, the rest of this place can be eaten later!"

They all laughed a high-pitched laugh.

I'm not a hero – I'm a science-fiction writer. I'm a husband...my wife needs me!"

Night said "We hear that a lot – especially from old folks."

Snack repeated "We eat the past, and you're the past."

"No, I'm alive! I'm here talking to my own idiot brain, trying to concoct a new sci-fi story!"

Night replied "No."

My heart started pounding, my head felt light – I'd better get up and get a glass of water.

Snack said "It won't help – you're ours."

"Exactly who are you – at least tell me that."

Off, *Out*, *Night* and *Snack* took turns explaining: "*Pseudos* live between things – you'd call us quantum pseudo-particles, but we're different from your imaginings of the universe. We were there first, and we'll be there till the end. We eat the past to make room for the future."

Nobody's going to believe this – it's too far-fetched...quantum particles that eat the past to make way for the future – nah, I'll never sell it.

Snack said "You won't because you'll be eaten and gone."

I won't be gone because my wife will remember me – my friends will remember me.

Off cut me off "Memories are history – we eat history."

"No!" I shouted into the dark room, "I remember things – you can't pretend that I don't have a memory of history."

Out said "Memories are an imperfect echo of the past, and we eat them until they're completely gone."

My wife rolled over in the bed and I looked at her in the dark room. I felt years and years of love for her, compressed into a single moment of time. *What will she do without me?*

The voices in my mind sounded like young women: "On Earth, we've been called *Valkyrie* by Vikings. They thought we escorted souls of brave heroes to *Valhalla*."

But the Vikings are history – there's proof that you don't eat history! If I remember them, then you haven't eaten them."

Off cut me off "All memories are history. You think you remember Vikings – you can't even remember what you read in the newspaper last week."

She was right. Look – if you're quantum particles, then you have a beginning and an end; at least I know that. And you have to obey the laws of physics.

Night replied "We don't come from here; we don't come from now. We balance the universe. We make sure the past gets eliminated, so there can be a future."

Off interrupted "...else no room."

Snack interjected "It's an essential job, but nobody appreciates us, not really."

I feebly thought "What about libraries – they maintain the past."

Out said "We eat libraries. We eat stars."

There has to be more than 4 of you to eat all the past in the entire universe!

They all giggled a high-pitched giggle.

Off said "You're just lucky there's not more!"

"Prove it!" I demanded. "Prove that you eat the past! I've seen pictures of the Big Bang, the beginning of time, and that's proof that you don't eat the past!"

They all joined together and explained "No, you can't see the past back to the Beginning. Your scientists can only see back to a time when the universe ionized. Before that, we ate it up – it's totally gone."

I stumbled out of bed and finished jotting down my notes.

Night said "You're a hero, and we're taking you to Valhalla, can you understand that?"

And then she put images into my mind of all the brave things that I'd done in my life, most of which I'd long-forgotten. Then I hit my head on the night stand as I collapsed on the floor...

A small obituary in the *Huntsville Times* a few days later said: "*John Gregory Medina, 66, of Huntsville, died from a fall in the bedroom on January 14th. He is survived by his loving wife, Edna.*"

NOTE: This story is in the format of "flash fiction," which allows a maximum of 1,000 words.