

From the very beginning, it had called itself Shape. This was because, no matter what it did, it always had shape and form. Granted it was often not the same shape from one moment to the next, but however it changed, it always had shape. There must have been a moment when it had decided on the name, but it would have been impossible to pinpoint it. The decision had been made and the name stuck, though it did not know where the word had come from, nor indeed the very concept of shape and form. All it knew was that it was Shape, and that was all that mattered.

Shape did not recall what had come before it chose to name itself. Frankly it wasn't important. There had been someone, another entity. Different to Shape. Then again, everything was different to Shape. It had never learned of its ability to change. It had come naturally. Shape had been far more shocked to discover that other things could not change as it did. That was why Shape took to observing things, sometimes for days on end, in an effort to find something else that could change.

Most of these other things moved, as Shape did, yet their form stayed the same. Sometimes they would stop for a time, then would carry on in the very same form as before. This was puzzling at first. Perhaps these things were lazy or not as clever as Shape. To it, the thought of being the same all the time was ridiculous. It had always been different. It was not now what it was in the beginning, and possibly never would be again. Why be just one thing when you can be many? It was so obvious and yet these other things just didn't seem to understand.

The first time Shape took pity and decided to show one of these other things how to change was the first time one of them tried to kill it. The thing had been bigger than Shape at that moment, though of course Shape could have changed into something bigger, had it not been so startled. Shape had chosen to flee, to hide. It was something Shape began to do a lot of. Hiding and observing. Observing and hiding.

Shape learned how to differentiate between the things. Two factors were evident. What did not move was safe. What moved was not safe. It was after learning this vital lesson that Shape took to being something that did not move for quite some time. That way, Shape itself would be safe.

As it did not move, Shape still observed. For some time, it considered naming the things it could observe, just as it had named itself. This thought was soon dismissed. Shape could become any of these things. What did it matter what they were called? To be a thing was all that mattered. Shape was the only name it needed to know. Everything else could keep its name to itself.

Time meant very little. Shape saw that all around it would sometimes be dark and sometimes there would be light. It paid such things no notice, until boredom began to settle in. Torn between the desire to be things and the desire to be safe, Shape decided it was best to be things in the dark. Not much else moved in the dark, so Shape could move as much as it liked. The dark was safe.

Each excursion into the dark became an exciting experiment. Shape would try different ways of moving. Some felt better than others, though it couldn't quite decide on which was the best. As time went on, during the times of light and not moving, Shape would observe the different other things and how they moved. Some would move on two appendages, some on four. Some chose to move up and down and all around above, which once again led Shape to the conclusion that some of these things were lazy. Why only move one way when you could choose to move every way? There was no getting away from it. These things were either lazy or stupid.

Sounds were something that Shape had ignored in the beginning. Being something had always felt more important than making noises. Now, as it began to feel it was running out of things to be, it slowly began to take note of the different noises these other things made. It seemed like a silly thing to do at first, but eventually Shape decided to try. The sounds were difficult at first, but it turned out some were rather amusing to make. However, it was because of the sounds that the attacks began again.

Shape would never admit it, but it had been careless. Perhaps it made the wrong sound for its current shape, but whatever the reason, something attacked it. There had been loud noises that hurt, but not as much as what these other things did. They struck Shape, quickly teaching it what pain was. It was something to be avoided wherever possible.

From then on, Shape knew it would have to use all it had learned to a purpose. When attacked, it deduced what it needed to become in order to survive there and then. If one of the lazier things attacked it, Shape could become one of those things that moved up, down and all around to get away easily. Sometimes it would need to become something bigger. On more than one occasion it struck out at the things that attacked it. Those things stopped moving, but Shape had observed that before. Things that did not move were safe.

The light and the dark no longer mattered as much as they used to. Shape began moving whenever it wanted to. The other things no longer frightened Shape, though it would often seem that Shape frightened the other things. Shape did sometimes take the form of the things that moved on two appendages and made the most complicated noises. It would move among them, undetected, knowing it could flee or defend itself if it needed to. The things on two appendages were not as likely to detect Shape's difference as other things were, but sometimes they worked it out.

It was after one of the occasions where Shape had decided to flee that it first noticed the oddest thing. That was literally what Shape came to call it, "The Oddest Thing", which in itself was a novelty as Shape had never felt the need to name anything. This Oddest Thing introduced Shape to a new sensation; being followed. Nothing had ever followed Shape before. Things moved around in spite of Shape and they sometimes moved away because of Shape, but nothing had ever chosen to follow it. This thing had been watching when Shape was discovered and when Shape had left the large gathering of things, this Oddest Thing followed.

At first, Shape decided to try and lose it. Shape became something else, something that moved differently to the Oddest Thing. For a short time, it seemed to work, but soon enough the Oddest Thing managed to catch up somehow, still in the same form as it had been before. Shape tried this again several times, changing into something different each time, eventually moving out to somewhere wide and empty. Space all around, with nothing to be that Shape had not been many times before. Still the Oddest Thing followed.

Shape considered striking the Oddest Thing and stopping it from moving. It had not done harm yet, but surely it meant to. The Oddest Thing was clearly stupid. It deserved to stop moving. Still, the Oddest Thing had aroused Shape's curiosity. It could follow Shape even when it became other things. Perhaps it wasn't all that stupid. Finally, Shape decided there was only one thing to do. It must stop moving.

Shape became something that did not move. Small, unassuming and just like many other things around it. Shape waited a while for the Oddest Thing to catch up. When it did, Shape remained where it was. The Oddest Thing stopped, closer to Shape now than it had ever been allowed to come. Just as Shape was deciding whether to flee or strike, the Oddest Thing made a noise.

‘You’ve stopped, at last! I do not wish to harm you.’

Shape took some time deciding what to do. The Oddest Thing was looking directly at Shape as it made the noise, so it was clearly not lazy or stupid. Shape waited a moment. If the Oddest Thing did mean harm, it would probably have done so by now. Unable to make noises in its present form, Shape decided to become something similar to the Oddest Thing. Two appendages and able to make the same sounds.

‘You are the Oddest Thing,’ said Shape.

‘Some would say the same of you,’ replied the Oddest Thing. ‘Do you have a name?’

‘I am Shape.’

‘You are many shapes, I would say.’

‘I am Shape!’ asserted Shape more forcefully. The Oddest Thing held up one of its other appendages, the ones not used for moving.

‘My apologies,’ it said, sounding different now. Quieter.

‘Why do you follow me?’ asked Shape.

‘I am fascinated by you. There are many who don’t believe you exist. More fool them, given the strange and wonderful nature of our world.’

‘The world is not strange,’ said Shape dismissively. ‘I know the world.’

‘Indeed? Then perhaps-’

‘You do not want to hurt me?’ interrupted Shape.

‘No, not at all. In fact, I’d like to help you.’

Shape made a noise it had often heard other such things make. It had generally deduced that they made this noise when something particularly amusing had happened. Shape made sure the noise was loud, to be sure to get across to the Oddest Thing just how amusing it was being.

‘I do not need your help!’ barked Shape. ‘I fear no thing.’

‘I should hope not,’ said the Oddest Thing. ‘It’s just that sort of courage I’m looking for. I think we could help each other.’

‘I could certainly help you, but how can you help me?’ scoffed Shape. ‘I have been everything!’

‘Yes, but I could help you be more.’

Shape stopped and observed. The Oddest Thing was holding out one of its appendages now, towards Shape. It did not seem threatening. Shape knew when things intended harm, for they had done it often enough. This one was different.

‘There is more?’ asked Shape.

‘Oh yes, so much more,’ replied the Oddest Thing, ‘and I can show you it all. Please, take my hand.’

It took Shape a moment to deduce what the Oddest Thing meant by “hand”. Once it had realised this, Shape turned its thoughts to the offer. This thing did not seem afraid of Shape. It knew of more things to be. Most

importantly, it did not mean harm. Shape slowly reached out with its own current appendage, carefully placing it with that of the Oddest Thing. It took a gentle hold of Shape with no pain. It seemed it could be trusted.

As Shape began to move away with the Oddest Thing, a thought occurred.

‘What is your own name?’ asked Shape.

‘My name is Torvik,’ said the Oddest Thing. ‘We shall have to come up with a new name for you. If we are to help each other, you will have to blend in with the Figments more easily.’

‘Mine is a good name,’ said Shape casually.

‘Oh yes, I agree,’ said Torvik, ‘but don’t worry, we’ll think of something that suits you.’