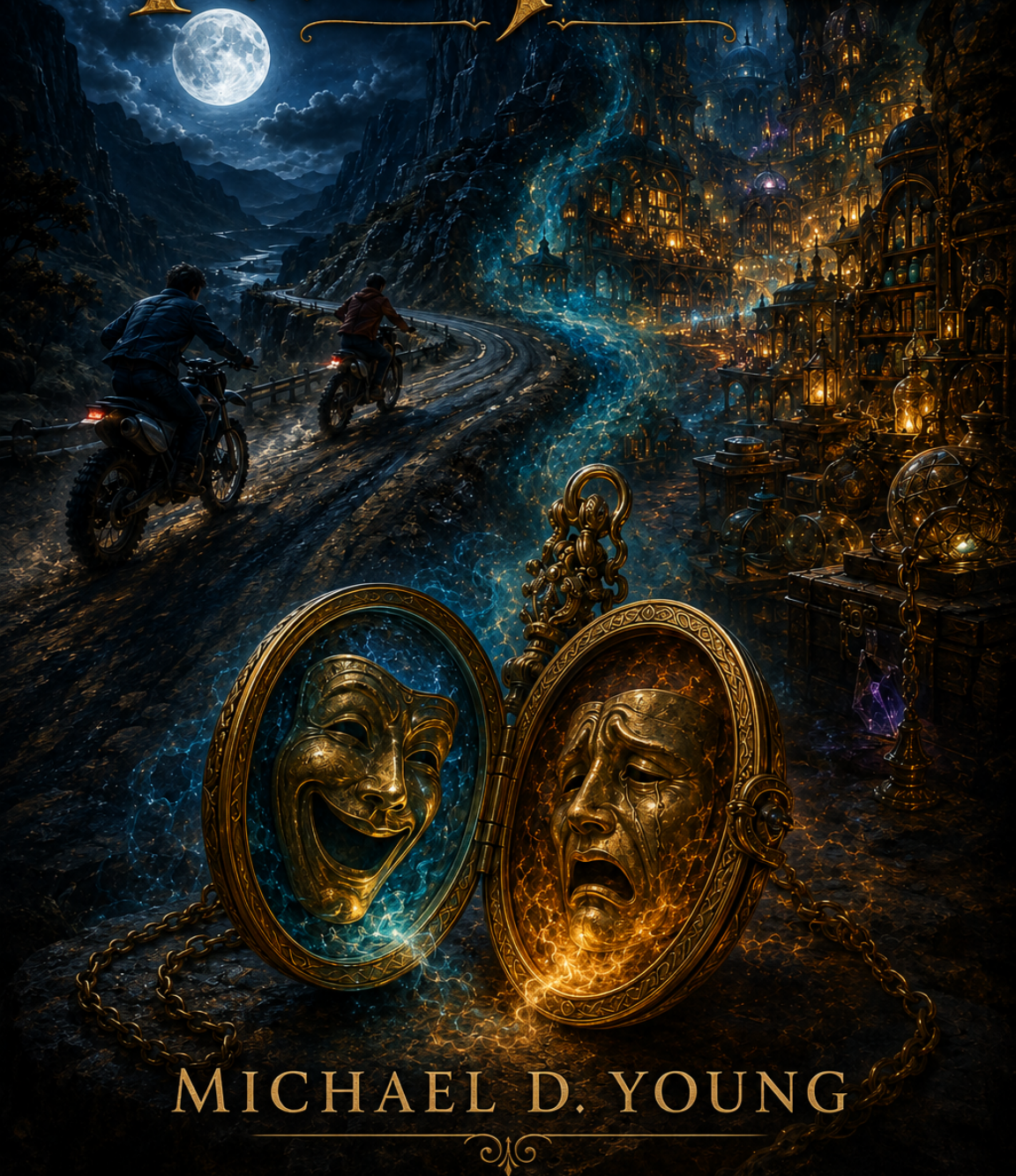


A PAST WITH TWO FACES



MICHAEL D. YOUNG

FREE READING SAMPLE

A Past With Two Faces

Save His Brother. Lose His Future.

Frank Edison has never escaped the guilt of the night his brother Todd died. Years later, a mysterious golden locket pulls at the wound he thought he had learned to live with - and opens the door to a past that may not stay buried.

This free sample contains Chapter One: The Night Ride, the accident that shapes Frank's life and sets the novel's time-bending mystery in motion.

ONE CHANGED MOMENT. TWO POSSIBLE LIVES.

A time-travel fantasy thriller by Michael D. Young

CHAPTER ONE

THE NIGHT RIDE



With a final yell, I coasted in and halted my motorcycle next to my brother's. He waved as we both took off our helmets.

Exhausted and slightly dejected, my brother Todd and I were about to pack up and go home for the evening. It had been a day of intense racing, facing off against some of the best guys in school. I had come very close but had not managed to emerge victorious out of any of the races.

The cool night air that had refreshed me was beginning to take on a biting chill and nothing sounded better to me than a steaming mug of cocoa before crawling into bed. However, a burning desire to race still lingered in the back of my mind. The moon shone full above our heads, awaking that werewolf inside me-the creature who just had to win. "Hey Todd," I called over to my brother. "Are you beat yet?"

Todd turned around slowly while running his fingers through his dark hair, massaging his scalp. "Not really. I was kind of disappointed that it had to end this way. That lucky son of a gun should be put away for his own good, if you ask me."

The last race had been won only by a lucky and dangerous stunt on the part of the victor. Must have been someone without a mother at home to worry about him.

Frank shrugged and got back to packing up his gear, but I still was not satisfied. "Hey, what do you say to another quick round at the canyon, just you and me? One of us has to win when racing one on one. What do you say?"

His eyes locked on me for a good minute as if he was contemplating something difficult. He glanced back towards the canyon and then inside the pocket of his leather jacket. Finally, he took a deep breath and sighed. "All right, but we got to make it quick, because I have to meet someone tonight."

His words piqued my curiosity. "Meet someone? Like what kind of someone?"

He chose his words carefully. “Um, no one. Just a, uh, some ...girl.”

Todd’s shyness startled me. He was not one to be bashful about bragging about women. “What kind of girl, bro?” “Well, just a girl. How many different kinds of girls do you know?”

Todd’s cheeks were genuinely turning red. I was going to milk this for all it was worth. “Plenty, Todd,” I chuckled a little under my breath. “What is this, a date? Studying for a history exam with Lorraine again? Come on, bro. Just tell me.”

Seeing that I wasn’t going to let up, he shook his head and threw up his hands. “Whatever. Truth is, I don’t know exactly who I’m meeting.”

My interest level shot through the roof, “You mean, somebody set you up on a blind date?”

“No,” he replied hastily, “not exactly. It was weird. somebody left this with a note in my bedroom. Dad said she let her in, but she won’t tell me who it was.”

He reached deep into his jacket pocket and produced a shiny, golden locket in the form of an intricately carved mask, the kind that hangs over a stage in a theater. The locket took on a luminous quality in the moonlight and immediately I felt my cheeks flush and my blood turn icy.

“It’s something else isn’t it?” he continued in awe, “It came with a note. I’m supposed to meet the person who gave this to me at ten o’clock tonight in front of the fountain at Eden Park. And no, I don’t have any guesses about who it is.”

I stood there, my jaw slightly open, with the funny feeling gnawing at my stomach that I had seen that locket somewhere before. I glanced at my watch, “Well, it’s only eight fifteen,” I mumbled, “if we get going right away, we could be back by nine, which would give you just enough time to get back to the park by ten.”

Todd stood there silently. “I don’t know, Frank,” he said, “couldn’t we settle this some other time? I mean, the mountain isn’t going anywhere, and neither are we. Let’s call it a night.”

“Todd, I don’t know when we’ll get another chance,” I said, “School starts next week and you know how busy junior and senior years are going to be. Most of the guys are parking their bikes in their garages for good now. Come on, we won’t stay long. I’ll just race you to the Blob.”

The Blob was a huge misshapen rock formation halfway down the canyon. The suggestion seemed to soften Todd, and finally he nodded, “Okay, but just as long we are back by ten.”

He reached into his pocket and gazed at the locket one more time, “I’ll see you at the base,” he called softly before strapping back on his helmet, saddling up his faithful iron steed, and rocketing off towards the beginning of the trail

Not wanting to be outdone, I too, slammed on my helmet, leapt aboard my bike, and launched off after him.

The landscape became a blur as I raced down the trail past the “Danger: Falling Rocks” sign, past the entrance to the canyon, and almost past my brother who was still speeding down the trail just in front of him. Todd had a head start, which I quickly made up for with a few well-placed maneuvers through the jagged rocks dotting the terrain. Soon we rode neck and neck, our loose jackets flaring out wildly as the wind whipped through our hair. Just so that we could keep the competitive banter alive during the races, Todd and I had installed headsets in our helmets.

Stealing a glance over at me Todd yelled, “No sweat, eh, Frank?”

“My pulse hasn’t even risen, Todd,” I replied.

I was cut off short by a low outcropping of rock that I had to duck in order to keep from bashing my skull. The blood rushed to my face. Try as I might, I couldn’t shake my pursuer. His bike and mine wove in and out of the formations of rock like a needle guiding thread. The race continued at this maddening pace until, finally, I caught a glimpse of our target in the distance: The Blob.

“Hey,” I called out to Todd, “did you know I have my pilot’s license?”

Todd cocked his head to one side and yelled back, “No. Why do you bring it up?”

Before I could answer, I showed him. I located a sharply inclined ramp that provided a vital, but dangerous shortcut and launched myself into the air. The rush of elation hit me hard and I let out a whoop.

Resisting the urge, I kept both hands gripping the bike until I finished my triumphant flight and my tires made jolting contact with the dusty earth.

“Yeah! A perfect flight, with only a little turbulence.”

It wasn’t until I heard a strange whirring noise behind me, like the spinning of an airplane propeller that I glanced to see if my brother had followed. A

brilliant, eerie glow filled the starry night and temporarily blinded me. Disoriented, I blinked furiously to try to restore my vision. I cut the throttle and tried to regain control of my vehicle, but before I could manage it, my front tire skipped on a large stone and I flew from the bike.

I skidded to a halt and lay on the ground in agony. My entire left side was one huge welt of road rash, and I knew I must have cracked a rib or two because of the sharp stabs of pain that occurred when I breathed. I tasted blood from the corners of my mouth and removed my helmet to wipe it off with my sleeve. Panic swept my thoughts.

As I turned around, the world took on a slow motion feel to it. My blood turned to lead in my veins as I watched my brother take the ramp after me.

Despite my mental protestations, I lay helpless as I saw my brother fall short, smash brutally against the opposite wall, and plummet to the depths below.

In an instant, the wind escaped my lungs as surely as if I had been at the receiving end of a sledgehammer blow. Numbly, my heart wrestled with my brain to comprehend the event I had just witnessed. Suddenly, the scrapes and bruises on my arms became the least of my worries as a tortured cry escaped my chest and my heart broke in two.

The cry echoed off into the silence, and I sunk to my knees and threw my head in my hands

After that, all I remember was the shame. The horrible feeling that this was my fault. I should have let my brother run off on his little date.

He'd probably still be around. We'd both have lovely families and I'd take my children over to see their Uncle Todd. My own selfishness robbed all those years from me in a single night.

The police came in and searched for the body the next week, even though they eventually came up with Todd's battered remains, strangely, his motorcycle never showed up. They took my account of the story, but, mostly, they wrote it off as if I were crazy.

Nobody's words really ever brought me comfort. That is, until Christine Day entered my life. She and I first hit it off at a meeting of the drama club of which she was president. I admit, I joined the club mostly to get the chance to be near her, but I soon found theater interesting enough.

From the beginning, we seemed meant for each other. I found it so easy to talk to her about the subjects that were most important to me. While others

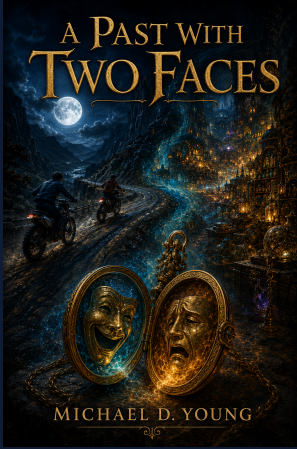
offered hollow apologies and shallow advice, she offered me genuine sympathy and constant support. We dated through high school and college, then finally married and started a family.

However, despite my happy life, I couldn't truly let go of the memory of that night and the feelings that it invoked. Every year on the anniversary of the accident, I made it a tradition to hike the trail to the accident site to pay my respects to Frank.

I figured that year would be as uneventful as any other year. That year, however, I learned firsthand that certain things are best left buried in the past.

READY TO CHANGE THE PAST?

The Story Has Only Begun



Frank can never undo the night Todd died - until the impossible gives him a chance. But changing one moment may erase the very life he is trying to save.

Continue A Past With Two Faces and discover what waits beyond the locket.

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