

A Great BIG Change

A short story by Henry Cavanaugh

Years down the line, The Great Change would be taught in History classrooms across the world. They still wouldn't have many of the answers - nobody could quite agree on what had actually caused the global event - but there was some recognition of how it marked the start of a more peaceful and understanding age. On that very first morning though, when billions of people were waking up in bodies that were not their own, things were about as far from peaceful as could possibly be.

While presidents and chief executive officers were waking up in the bodies of janitors and trash collectors and bursting into fits of rage and despair, ordinary hard working folks like Dennis were having rather different responses. Like everybody else, he had gone to sleep the night before with no expectations of anything dramatic happening overnight, but there was definitely at least some small part of him that was hoping for a dramatic change in his life.

Now, it wasn't as if Dennis had a *bad* life necessarily, it just wasn't as fulfilling or as exciting as he'd dreamed it would be back when he had been a kid. He was in his mid-twenties and he still felt like his life was yet to begin. There were definitely days when he had found himself in front of the mirror looking at his tall and slender body and feeling detached from his own body, as if he was wearing the wrong man's skin. It was a strange thought and he knew it, but it was one that had forced its way into his mind many times over the years.

It wasn't just his physique that bothered him from time to time either, as Dennis often found himself frustrated at how he struggled to break out of his introverted ways and become a more open and communicative person. He only wished that he had the confidence to approach other people and make friends, or to go out and see more of the world than just his hometown. He had dreams of seeing places like Germany, India and South Korea, but the mere prospect of traveling alone terrified the young man and he wasn't nearly good enough friends with anyone to get them to agree to go on such a momentous trip with him!

Dennis' desires to see more of the world and to escape the drudgery of his daily life would be granted that night, courtesy of the Great Change. Countless scientists and philosophers debated in the years that followed whether or not a person's experiences, goals and previous behavior factored into how the Great Change had treated them but once again, nobody could ever come to an agreement. Some insisted that the event had been entirely random while others insisted that it was the work of some "higher

power” or deity that had carefully organized the movement of the Earth’s population between bodies. It seemed likely that the answers would never be found and as the years rolled on, a good majority of the people who had been affected by the event learned to accept as such and simply move on with their new lives.

When that fateful morning rolled around, Dennis was greeted by the sound of a K-Pop song playing in the distance. This wasn’t completely out of the ordinary, as he’d long been a fan of the genre, but he couldn’t quite remember putting any on before falling asleep the previous night. The music was much too energetic to be considered relaxing; it made him want to dance (or at least *attempt* to dance) rather than lay back and fall into a deep slumber. Although the presence of the music sparked some curiosity within Dennis, it was only when he opened his eyes and looked up at an unfamiliar ceiling that he started to realize that something was wrong.

Well, perhaps in his case *wrong* was a poor choice of words. *Different* was more like it, considering Dennis was one of the lucky people who found themselves in a better life after the Great Change.

He had stared up at the unfamiliar ceiling for several long seconds before finally pushing himself up into a seated position and this was when he *really* noticed just how different things were. There was absolutely no ignoring the fact that Dennis’ body was much heavier than he was used to and rising up to that seated position took a surprising amount of effort. A deep grunt had escaped his lips in tandem with the movement which caught Dennis even further off guard. It hadn’t sounded like his voice at all! Then again, as he looked down at himself, Dennis realized that there was very little about himself at that moment that was even the slightest bit familiar. His body was (to put it quite simply) the size of a tank!

“What the shit?” the man muttered to himself, swinging his legs out of the bed and then marveling at how humongous each of his quads were. They had to be as wide as his whole waistline had been just a day before! Below those giant thighs were a pair of incredibly defined calves, the horseshoe-shaped muscles being much bigger than any that Dennis had seen with his own eyes before. His body wasn’t just muscular, it was practically monstrous! He had somehow risen from his sleep with the proportions of a bodybuilder and even though he was absolutely bewildered by the change, Dennis found immediate pleasure in it. Even though he’d never really been able to develop muscle on his body before, he’d always enjoyed the look of muscular guys, even those that were so big that some might refer to them as freaks of nature. Given what he saw before him, Dennis was certain that he would be fitting pretty firmly into that category for as long as this strange dream lasted.

Of course, the belief that this was all just a dream was a natural instinct for those who had been affected by the Great Change. It was incredibly difficult for anyone other than the most open-minded people in the world to simply accept the fact that they really had woken up in another person's body. When they didn't wake up from this supposed slumber though, one by one people slowly started to believe and Dennis was among that crowd.

As he stepped out of the bed and rose carefully to his feet, Dennis cast his eyes around the unfamiliar bedroom. He immediately took notice of the various bodybuilding trophies that lined a shelf above a large flatscreen television, which made sense given what he had seen so far of the body he was currently occupying. The rest of the bedroom's furnishings all appeared to be of very good quality and likely highly expensive which was a far cry from what Dennis was used to. Then again, he was encountering very little that morning which could be classed as familiar. *At least I'm still a guy*, he jokingly remarked to himself, little knowing that there were millions of people across the globe who had been switched into a body of a different gender from their own.



Entering the en-suite bathroom, Dennis quickly caught the eye of the man in the mirror and was stopped right in his tracks. The face being reflected back at him was most certainly not his own. He didn't have the bright blue eyes or the curly blond hair that he was used to seeing, nor were any of the other features even remotely familiar to him! His nose was wider, his eyes less sunken into his face and cheeks were fuller, all of which painted quite the handsome picture. His hair was as black as coal and much shorter in length, with a faded style at the sides and not a blond curl to be seen!

The unfamiliar face wasn't all that caught the young man by surprise. Dennis wasn't sure how he had failed to notice when he'd been in the bedroom that his skin tone was a slightly darker shade than the pale pink he had always had! Given the evidence that was being reflected back at him in the mirror, Dennis didn't have to be a genius to surmise that he had somehow woken up in the body of a Korean man! What a mighty muscular man he was too - he looked like he could crush planets with his bare hands!

Still firm in his belief that this was nothing more than an incredibly vivid dream, Dennis decided that there were much more pressing issues than finding out what had caused him to awaken in a body that was so vastly different to his own. One such pressing issue was the intense desire that had been building for as long as he had been staring at the unfamiliar reflection - he simply *had* to flex his muscles! Having never possessed any sort of musculature to speak of, it was a completely foreign experience to Dennis (with no pun intended, considering the circumstances) and one he was incredibly eager to finally experience.



Lifting up one arm to his side, Dennis kept his eyes trained on his reflection as he brought his forearm up towards the ceiling and tensed all the muscles along the limb as hard as he possibly could. Watching the bicep rise like a mountain caused the man's jaw to drop and his delighted surprise was only furthered when he saw just how prominent the veins on the muscle were. *Damn, these muscles have gotta be bigger than my head!* It was a novel concept but one that absolutely delighted the man! "I'm freaking huge! I don't think there's a guy on Earth who could push me around anymore!"

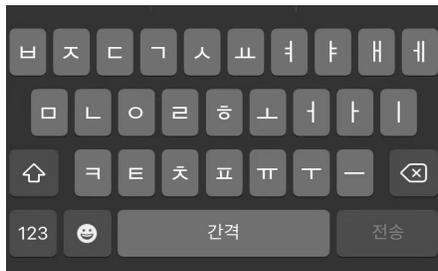
For the next ten minutes or so, Dennis remained rooted right in front of the mirror, cycling through a series of poses that flexed various muscles across his gargantuan new body. Each and every flex produced sensations of wonder and delight within the man, like he was watching the most extraordinary film ever made. He was seriously grappling with the understanding that *he* was the

one responsible for the beautiful images he saw in the mirror, even if there were some definite caveats on that statement. Somebody else had done the hard work of sculpting all those perfect muscles and Dennis was just enjoying the results.

After finally tearing himself away from the mirror, the man set about exploring his new surroundings further. The rest of the house was every bit as large and expensive as the bedroom he'd woken up in, so whoever's flesh he was now occupying definitely had enough money to live a comfortable life! He was able to find a cell phone resting on a countertop in the kitchen, which he quickly picked up, only to chuckle at how small the device appeared to be in his giant hands. The cell phone unlocked easily thanks to facial recognition and after scanning the available apps on the home screen, Dennis clicked into Twitter. With the voice in his head suggesting that this was in fact *not* a

dream growing louder with every passing minute that he didn't wake up, the young man was curious to see if anybody else was experiencing the same abnormal wakeup.

Unfortunately the timeline that greeted Dennis was of very little help, as every one of the tweets was written in Korean characters and he instantly gave up, knowing that even attempting to read them would get him nowhere. Exiting out of the app, Dennis then navigated into the text messaging system and opened up the screen to conduct a new



message. After typing in his own phone number into the recipient bar, the man then opened up the keyboard to begin typing out a message, only to once again be greeted by a page of Korean characters rather than the English alphabet. "Shit," he cursed under his breath, shaking his head, "I guess I should have seen that coming."

With this new roadblock thrown up in front of him, Dennis decided to try and get around the language barrier by recording a voice note. "Hey, uh, this is Dennis and I woke up in another man's body this morning," he began, struggling to keep himself from laughing. It all sounded so silly when said out loud! "I'm not sure if it's your body or whatever but I'm a Korean bodybuilder now and... uh, I guess I just wanted to see who's in my body since I'm clearly not there. Um, call me or text me or whatever?"

Dennis was cringing when he finished the recording, unable to shake the feeling that he'd embarrassed himself. Rather than sending it straight away though, he decided to listen back to it in order to see if it was worth re-recording. When he hit the 'play' button though, the body-swapped man was in for quite the shock - he hadn't been talking in English at all like he'd thought! No, his words were in completely fluent Korean and the more he listened back to the message, the more Dennis realized that he actually *understood* the unfamiliar words being played back at him.

Switching back to the text keyboard, Dennis focused on the multitude of Korean characters and slowly came to the realization that just like with the voice note, he could actually understand them! Still reeling from this mind-boggling revelation, Dennis switched back to the Twitter app and navigated to the 'Trending Tweets' section. Unlike the initial timeline, the vast majority of these tweets weren't written in Korean but rather a language that he couldn't understand. The letters looked familiar - incredibly so, actually - but he simply couldn't string them together to form words or sentences. After several minutes of looking at this foreign language, Dennis finally realized why the letters had looked familiar: the tweets were written in English! The only issue was, it seemed that he no longer had the capability of actually reading (or, if he was to guess, speaking) the language he'd grown up with. *This is the craziest morning ever*, Dennis thought to himself, suddenly aware that he was even his thoughts were in Korean!

The hulking man spent much of the first day after the Great Change within the residence he'd woken up in, fearing what he would find outside. He could already see the chaos brewing from his window and he didn't want any part of it. No, it was better and safer to stay indoors and wait this whole body swapping scenario out.

To keep himself busy, Dennis further familiarized himself with the identity he had unwittingly adopted by looking through the man's social media pages. It seemed his new name was Kae Joo-Won and his bodybuilding career was so successful that he even had his IFBB Pro card! Not only did Joo-Won have quite a sizable following in the bodybuilding community, but he also seemed to be a brand ambassador for various fitness companies. His Instagram page was populated with posts promoting protein shakes and gym wear, so much so that Dennis (he wouldn't come to think of himself as Joo-Won for at least another few months) couldn't help but wonder just how populated the man's bank account was. *These sponsorships have gotta be raking the money in!*



While he was busy looking through Joo-Won's phone, Dennis was surprised to receive a message from an unknown phone number. He hadn't actually sent the voice note to his own phone number in the end, having been too shocked by the discovery that he'd been speaking and thinking in a foreign language (at least to him) up until that point. After discovering that he couldn't actually read English any longer, he didn't hold much hope that he'd even be able to understand if they were to respond. The message he received from the unknown number confirmed as much - it was written in English and as such was frustratingly incomprehensible!

Cautiously optimistic, he copied the text into a Korean translator he found online, only for the phrasing to end up choppy. It was difficult to decipher much from the translation beyond the fact that the message seemed to be from the real Joo-Won, who was accusing him of stealing his body. Rather than bothering to type a reply and put it through a translator, Dennis decided simply to ignore Joo-Won's text. He knew he wasn't responsible for any of this madness, nor was he some sort of body thief. He was as much in the dark as everyone else, so it wouldn't do to labor himself down with more stresses than were necessary. Honestly, Dennis was surprised he'd managed to remain so calm throughout such a crazy morning! *Well, the big muscles helped...*

After a handful of days seeing nothing but the interior of the Joo-Won's admittedly very nice home, Dennis was going understandably stir crazy. Eventually he decided to brave the outside and much to his surprise, much of the chaos of the first day had already died down. It would take a long time for the world to find its new rhythm but a new normalcy was in the process of being created. Some people were adapting and adopting to the lives of those whose bodies they had been switched into while others were using it as an opportunity to a completely fresh start. Stores had reopened, the emergency services were slowly returning to full staffing and there was an overall optimism in the air that Dennis found positively infectious.

Once he had stocked up on necessary groceries and refilled the kitchen cupboards and the fridge (unsurprisingly it turned out that his big body needed a lot more food than he was used to consuming), Dennis decided to try his hand at the Joo-Won's local gym. He'd found a membership card while searching through the assorted items on the nightstand and the concept of getting to pump some iron had refused to leave his head from that moment forward. Now that he knew that the apocalypse wasn't raging right outside his door, Dennis leapt at the opportunity to finally test out his new strength.

Despite a sign over the door stating that it was a professional bodybuilding gym, at least half of the clientele there when Dennis first entered couldn't really be considered bodybuilders. Many of them were as skinny as he had been back in his original body, but there were also a fair few men and women who were either overweight or so lightly muscled that they looked as weak as shrimp next to the muscle god that Dennis now was. After starting up conversations with a few of the gym's patrons who had approached him to tell him how lucky he was for the body he'd ended up in, Dennis learned that most of them had previously been bodybuilders who were now starting out on the long road to get back to their previous size. He found their commitment inspiring and some of them even volunteered to help him with his training. That wasn't completely necessary though, as it seemed like there was some muscle memory left in Joo-Won's body and Dennis had been able to progress through the Korean bodybuilder's usual workout with full intensity and confidence.

As the days turned into weeks and it became clear that the Great Change wasn't going to suddenly undo itself, Dennis grew more and more comfortable in both Joo-Won's body and his life. The fitness companies that Joo-Won had previously worked with had started to reach out and inquire whether the new occupant of the man's body was interested in signing a new deal with them, which Dennis had been all too happy to do. The gym wasn't just a regular part of his day but undoubtedly his *favorite* part; there was nothing that could compare to the pride he felt when he pushed a loaded barbell from his chest or hit a deep squat while carrying five times his previous bodyweight! He had become something of a local celebrity at the gym. He could barely go five minutes without somebody new attempting to strike up a conversation with him and although it

could get mildly frustrating at times, Dennis secretly loved it. While occupying Joo-Won's flesh he had none of the introverted nature that had previously held him back from making friends. In fact it was fair to say that he relished his newfound popularity just as much as he loved his new muscles. The fact that he had a pretty full bank account definitely helped matters too, as he was now well off enough thanks to the sponsorships that he didn't even need to get a day job to support himself. He could spend his days getting a two to three hour workout in, then use the rest of the day to explore his new city and its surroundings.

Although he would eventually choose to continue life under the name Kae Joo-Won, he never forgot his previous life as Dennis.

He still maintained many of the same interests he'd had prior to the Great Change - his gym playlist was mostly K-Pop, for instance - but he had a brand new lease on life and was doing everything he could to make sure that he was living it to the fullest. He'd even entered the dating scene in recent weeks and had a full calendar of dates lined up with various guys, one of whom might hopefully be the perfect match for him.

Being fortunate as he was, Joo-Won was quite content never knowing what had caused the Great Change. As far as he was concerned, it really had been *great* and given him one hell of a *big* upgrade! Should he ever be given the chance to reverse the effects of that fateful day, he wouldn't hesitate to reject. After all, why would the Great Change have ever happened if this wasn't who he'd always supposed to have been? He was Kae Joo-Won and there would never be any changing that!

