

Yelling Man.

Inspired by Leslie Silko, "Yellow Woman."

"I DIDN'T DO IT! I DIDN'T DO IT! IT WASN'T ME! I DIDN'T DO IT!"

You were panting as you stood in place. You turned in a circle and burst into another apoplectic spasm. **"I DIDN'T DO IT! IT WASN'T ME!"**

I was walking with my head down, lost in a reverie of an ice-cold Vernors Ginger Ale. My feet were swollen. The heat was oppressive, so saturated that it denied any escape. My clothes stuck to me with each step.

You were a short, wiry man in old black dress pants, a matching dress jacket, a soiled white shirt, and tennis shoes. Each time you shouted, you jumped a little and stiffened your arms and legs as if you'd gotten an electric jolt.

Until I saw you yelling, I didn't know if you were real. There were stories about you, how you would lure children into your rusty old van, or how you would jump a woman and grab her purse or worse. They could never catch you, it was said. Were the stories about you only stories?

I walked to within several feet of you. I wasn't afraid; it was the middle of the day and we were in front of the Detroit Public Library and there were people around.

"Yelling Man," I said to you. You stared at me, your head and chin jutting. You continued to breathe hard through your mouth; your mouth was wet. "What's your name?" I asked.

The blood vessels in your neck and arms stuck out. Your face shined with sweat. Your eyes bulged. **"NOT ME! IT WASN'T ME! IT WASN'T ME!"**

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I understand why you didn't tell me your name. When someone knows your name, they have a power over you. To possess someone's name is to possess *them*.

"Do you know the stories about you, Yelling Man?"

You remained indignant. **"IT WASN'T ME!"**

Library patrons circumnavigated us like you were a leper. You ignored them. One of them dared to get as near to you as I was. "You really ought to get out of here, y'know? You're scaring people."

A police car pulled up, windows up against the heat and humidity, the officers peering at you. They drove by. They had more important things to deal with.

Across the street was a parking lot, mostly vacant. In it idled a late model van with a lot of rust. "Yelling Man, I know your name."

You erupted in three staccato bursts. **"I! DIDN'T! DO IT!"**

"What are we waiting for?" I said, pointing to the van. "Let's go." I was sorry that no one would hear his story.

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