

*Why did God create a dual universe? So he might say,
"Be not like me. I am alone." And it might be heard.*

Mark Z. Danielewski

Only a damn lunatic would write a thing like this and then claim it was all true.

Hunter S. Thompson

*If you are reading this,
you are dying.
You are reading this at the same time as your cousins,
you are under my spell.*

Mark Wingdings

I

From a friend, dated July 3-6, 1992

Hello, friend. You knew me as Stephen Moore, but my real name is John. John Galamore. I have been here for about two years. I just turned 26, and before all this happened I was a writer. My greatest fear is that I might die in here. I'm not crazy. And you hear that a lot from people in the ward, but you can trust me. I'm not crazy. Don't worry, by the time you're done reading all of my emails, if you ever do read them, you will know how I ended up here. What's life like inside a mental hospital? It is almost like Hell, but at least in Hell you know you deserve to be there. My problem is the boredom. I feel sometimes as if my mind is in color, while the world around me is in black and white. And try

as I might to get the emotions out, the people in here aren't exactly good company for it.

I write to get the color out. Yeah, that sounds about right. Most of the patients come and go. Not me, I've been here for two years, and as I've said, I don't know if I'll ever leave. The thought frightens me beyond belief, because one day I will die, as all things must pass away, and I've spent far too much of my life locked away, unable to do anything but ponder the possibilities of a life on the outside, a life I most likely will never get to live again.

Death used to scare me. Now I know there are things far more frightening.

I get nightmares often. Before I started writing *The New King*, I used them as inspiration for my short stories. Now I put them in the book. Sometimes I forget them. The ones I forget are usually the scariest. The most real feeling. And though I can't remember them, they still feel vivid long after all is said and done.

After what happened, I started to smoke a lot of weed. And I drank a lot. And there was cocaine. Acid helped. Adderall and Xanax just made it worse. Yvonettes were the closest I came to finding peace. But I was careful with those.

You know how sometimes you face a decision, and you know what the right thing to do is? It seemed as if for a while that was the case for me, and I made all the wrong decisions.

We have been taught lies. Reality is not at all what we perceive it to be.

Mark Windings

I was 23 when I discovered the numbers. It was April of 1989, and I was privileged enough to have a phone caller identification service in my college dorm room. I received a call around 10 AM. When I saw the number for the first time, I didn't think much of it. It was just a number, ten digits. How could numbers really mean anything anyway? I mean sure, a number means something. It represents a value. But beyond that, nothing. Numbers don't reveal any hidden truths. Numbers can't hurt you. Right?

I answered the phone. There was silence for a moment.

"Hello?" asked a rather androgynous voice.

"Hello, who is this?" I replied.

"This is a representative of Janson Publishing, a subsidiary of the Janson Corporation. We have read all of your published works and would like to make a deal with you. Are you interested in making a deal?"

I was amazed. I'd only had three short stories published so far, what were the odds that someone out there, anyone out there at all, would have read my stuff and liked it enough to want to make some sort of deal with me? Too good to be true, most likely.

Once you make a deal, you really can't go back, they're unstoppable, like a great big wave in the ocean, sometimes they're lethal, too. But you'd know all about those kinds of deals, wouldn't you?

"Sure," I began slowly, "I'll make a deal."

"Thank you, we will be in touch." said the individual on the other end of the line finally. A pause- and another voice that sounded as if it were synthesized by a Speak & Spell (or, more accurately, a Speak & Math). It read the numbers. The same numbers that made up the phone number that called. Those damned numbers. The disconnect tone.

So that was my first interaction with the numbers. At the time I didn't even think the numbers had anything to do with anything. Just a strange call from a strange number that probably meant nothing.

I didn't have a computer at the time, so I went to the library. I searched the computer catalogue for "Janson" and the "Janson Corporation" and found nothing.

Then, on a whim, I searched for the numbers. There I found success. Titled *The Three Pillars of Armageddon*, under the ISBN of those same numbers, it was a fairly large book with only one copy available. I obviously checked it out, how could I not? I never returned the book.

There were strange symbols scrawled untidily on the first and last pages of the book. Symbols I now recognize as closely resembling the font *Wingdings*. Uncoincidentally, the author of the book is named *Mark Wingdings*.

But here's my problem. *Wingdings*, the font, was released *this* year. 1992. I mean I literally just now, two days ago specifically (my birthday), made the connection between the strange symbols and the font, because I only just recently

discovered the font existed. *The Three Pillars of Armageddon* was released in 1967. Meaning the author somehow-
It's impossible.
A coincidence.

Anyway, I tried to match the symbols to the font and found partial success. I say partial, because the second two symbols were translatable. It translated to *IT*, the word *IT*. The first symbol, which appeared to be actually two symbols, one on top of the other (it was essentially what looked like an axe on a block of wood. Does that mean anything to you? You won't respond, I don't know why I bother asking), was not translatable. I was allowed to bring my copy with me to the ward, so I can share with you quotes and excerpts from it.

Like it or not, everything is changing. The result will be the most wonderful experience in the history of man or the most horrible enslavement that you can imagine. Be active or abdicate. The future is in your hands.

Most of the book is as you read, cryptic but revealing. Entrancing, even. That was about the most readable chunk of text I could find as an example of Wingdings' writing. I must admit I feel a tinge of jealousy toward Wingdings. He has a way with words. I'll reveal more soon, don't worry. There's a lot of important links in there, but none of them will make sense to you now. I'm not sure if it'll make more sense by the time my tale is told, because I'm still puzzled, but maybe it'll help. It's helped me.

After getting the call, I started to work on my book. I'll send you the whole book, one piece at a time, and comment on what was going through my head writing it intermittently if I'm inclined.

The New King - Introduction

The grey stone floor of the cave was damp and cold, but it was nowhere as bad as it was outside, where the wind was icy sharp and unwelcoming- to put it lightly. Valeria was from Fable, a small riverside town in the south of Aseron. She was fourteen, and had long black hair and piercing blue eyes. Accompanying her were two friends, Nikolas, also fourteen, and Oliver, fifteen.

Oliver was the self-proclaimed leader of the quest, which seemed to have no objective other than to run away from home, where the three were poor and often hungry. They wanted to go on an adventure like in the stories, and win gold and fame.

“Why can’t we light a fire?” asked Valeria, looking out at the night sky, entranced.

“Because, it will attract the pesterlings,” said Nikolas.

“You don’t actually believe that, do you?” asked Oliver in retort. “Pesterlings aren’t real,” he finished.

The mountain, technically a volcano, was called Legendhymn as it concealed crypts full of the remains of legends. Rumour was, deep into the crypts one might find the gates to the underworld.

“Valeria, you get the first watch” Oliver said with a grin barely visible in the pale moonlight. “Don’t be an ass,” said Nikolas. Valeria laughed. Oliver punched Nikolas on his arm.

And then there was more laughter, another high pitched cackle from a mysterious voice in the dark, further into the cave.

Silence fell on the three adventurers.

“Who goes there?” said Oliver shakily, clearly trying to sound braver than he really was.

“Could it be a Pesterling?” asked Nikolas frantically. They had no weapons, thought Valeria suddenly. What were they to do?

There was more laughter. It was cold and distant. Piercingly evil.

“No, not pesterlings” said another shrill voice in the dark.

Valeria could faintly see Oliver looking around on the ground beneath them. He grabbed a rock and threw it into the darkness toward the voice. It made a sound as it hit the stone, missing.

Valeria was panicking, they were really over their heads now. And then one of them moved into the light.

It was a short, naked female. It looked almost human, but the skin was saggy and rotten, like the creature had died and risen from the grave after death. It had two beady black eyes, and a smile that looked far too wide to be natural. It slowly approached Oliver.

“Lord Ao and the five beyond, I call upon thee to protect me-” he began. “Foolish mortal,” interrupted the creature. “Nothing can save you now”

And then it jumped at Oliver and toppled him over, biting into his neck. Valeria could just see another creature come out into the light, this one in imperial armour, targeting Nikolas as she turned and fled.

The mountain had cobbled stairs running along the side of it all the way down, it was a long walk, but Valeria was running for her life. All the way down she ran, not looking back once. She had no idea what those creatures were, but she knew they would kill her if they had the chance, and she couldn’t let that happen.

She ran for what seemed like an hour across the foothills, into the plains south, until she spotted a small village in the distance with a tower about halfway between it and her. By then she was fairly certain the things hadn’t followed her, whatever they were. Tired beyond belief, she slowed to a walking pace and

slowly trudged along to the tower, when she reached it she collapsed beside it and almost immediately fell asleep.

25 Hours Ago - My Friend

I spend my days attending not-so-helpful HELP (His Everlasting Presence) sessions, reading books from the "library" (being a small closet with around 42 books) and talking to people who hear voices or have crippling addictions.

A lot of the patients show signs of turning. Most of them come and go before it gets bad. Not me, I've been here for two years, and as I've said, I don't know if I'll ever leave. Or turn. I've seen it all. However, I have yet to find someone to make really good conversation with. Except Ben. I like Ben. He's the first who hasn't turned in a while, and I've decided he deserves that. I've known him for about three weeks, and he's already my favorite person ever.

25 hours ago, July 2, 1992 at 7:00 AM, I woke to the sound of running and a woman screaming in the hall. I hear her get tackled, screaming, before her mouth is muffled and she's booty juiced.

Booty juicing, if you don't know, is when the mental health technicians (which are employed on a rotating basis, as the technicians often turn morbid before long) inject a sedative (generally midazolam or haloperidol and promethazine) into your ass. It's fun, I've acted out a few times to get juiced on purpose. It's an interesting high.

I make my bed as they carry her away, I grab my copy of *The Three Pillars of Armageddon* and enter the hallway. Ben is standing outside my open door.

"Hey, loon. Ready for another day in the funny farm?"

"Absolutely," I reply sleepily. I still haven't gotten used to getting up so early. And we can't drink coffee here. That would be insane, after all. Crazy people, drinking coffee? Get out of town.

We walk into the rather small Day Room, the first ones to enter, and one of the technicians turns off the TV, with the news headline reading **1,369 MORE TURNED YESTERDAY IN MORBID FUNGAL PANDEMIC, NUMBER EXPECTED TO GROW BY 33% TODAY. STAY INDOORS.**

Ben and I sit together in a corner, and I start to read my book, chapter nine, titled "New Physics: An Experimental Model of the Universe".

...Leary's pronouncement recalls an equally important theory:

The world is a disc which sits on the backs of four huge elephants, themselves standing on the back of a world terrapin, named Warden, as it slowly swims through space.

Nonsense, obviously. But it does provide a fantastic example of the...

I had read this chapter about a hundred times before, and I'll probably read it a hundred more. Of course I understand the reference to the world turtle. I even renamed the world turtle in my book to *Warden* after reading this bit for the first time. It was in another book I read long ago that there was a world turtle named Warden, but I can't seem to remember... "What do we have going on today?" I asked the technician, Gerald, (he's been here about a week. He won't last though. They never do.) He looks up from his book (*The Wind in the Willows*) and says "Something musical" dully.

"Oh, we can't miss that one." Ben whispers sarcastically with a smile. "I've never heard someone so excited about music." He then turns to Gerald. "Isn't it gym day, big G?" he adds and Gerald barely mutters "Yeah". And then, a nurse came in and handed out our medicine. I take three pills in the morning and two at night. Ben takes one in the morning and one at night. There are about seven people in the day room total at this point. Everyone takes their medicine, and we all have group therapy. I sit silently during therapy every morning without exception. I just don't have much to talk about. And then, around 8:00, it's computer time for me. I've been here long enough to have computer privileges. I'm emailing you these messages and some of my recent writings as I write them and will delete the files thereafter. Everyone else stays and watches TV. I know I'm lucky. It's only a matter of remembering that.

I forgot to actually do what I said I'd do and explain the introduction to my novel. Because as we all know, good art must always be explained to you by the creator, no exceptions. Obviously joking. Maybe I shouldn't explain. I think that might

be better, for both of us. You don't need footnotes to understand this story.

Writing this email to you has been a real trip for me, but I'm glad I have this now, and I'm going to hold onto the opportunity to "get the color out" while I have it. Even if you won't respond.

The New King - Chapter One

I

Elsewhere, Celia Fridman, Queen of Fridmont, cried out to the sky. It was teal and spread out against it were about a thousand little stars. She leaned against the railing atop the tallest bell tower in the Kingdom.

The land was all hers, she had all the gold a person could ask for. She was Queen. Yet she still cried. The King was dead, he had been found hanging in the royal hall a few hours before. Dameron Fridman was a good King, but he was not a good husband to Celia, nor was he a good father to his son, also named Dameron. Celia felt lost and alone. Whatever was she to do? How could she tell her son his father had died? Of course, they would keep from the people of Fridmont the nature of his death, but could she keep it from her son?

She was waiting for Kieran to join her. Kieran was the most strategic thinker in the Kingdom and the most trusted of the King's royal advisors.

"They've taken his body down, your majesty," said a voice from behind Celia. It was Kieran. "We will ring the bells at midnight." he finished.

"Thank you, Kieran," said the Queen. "But if you call me 'your majesty' again, I'll have your head on a stick."

She turned and grinned through her tears at the man, whose pale face was lit by the moonlight. He allowed himself a faint smile.

"And how are you managing?" he said stiffly as he crossed his arms. "Fine," lied the Queen. "Right now I am most concerned with how I will tell Dameron. He's still asleep, I suppose I should wake him and deliver the news before we ring the bells," she said.

Kieran frowned. "Would it help if I was there?" he asked. Kieran had a good relationship with the boy, perhaps even a better one than he had with his father. "No, I think I better tell him myself. Alone." said the Queen.

"What will we tell the people?" began Kieran, "We obviously can't tell them it was suicide. But maybe we can spin this, and blame the elves. The people already have reason to despise them." he finished.

"We will talk more about all that in the morning." she replied.

“We will have to have an event. Dameron must speak to his people. He’ll be made King within the fortnight, after all. The Adeladia girl will come to be made the new Queen. Until then, you will be retitled the Queen Mother.”

It was all too much for Celia. She had one thing, one person on her mind.

Her son slept soundly, his room was dark and silent. Celia grabbed a candlestick from the candelabra just outside the door and approached Dameron’s bedside. She knelt down and faced him. But she knew this would be the last time, or one of the last times, she would look upon his face and see a child. A King, at thirteen! It was insanity, and all of it was happening much too fast for Celia. But she knew she would need to power through this, for her son.

She reached out and shook Dameron awake. He slowly rose and faced Celia. “Mother?” he said sleepily, “What time is it?” Celia set the candle down on the table next to them, still on her knees. “It’s late. Almost midnight. Dameron, there’s something I need to tell you, and it’s important you’re awake. Are you awake?”

Dameron rubbed his eyes for a moment. “Yes, mother. I’m awake. What is it?” he asked, and Celia noticed some worry in his voice. “When I met your father, I was only fourteen. I am sure you’ve heard the stories a thousand times or more-”

“Mother... Can’t you do this in the morning? I’m tired, and not quite apt for storytelling.” he interrupted. “Hush, Dam. You may have heard the stories a thousand times or more, but tonight I will not be telling you a story. I will be telling you the truth, something you are not accustomed to. You have been pampered your entire life, Dameron. You have been treated as if you would never grow up.” Celia hesitated. “Your father always tried to tell me this, but it is only now that I realise it. I was only fourteen when I met your father. I was young, very young. And very scared. I still remember what it feels like, Dameron. That is why it is so sad that now I must bestow upon you this same burden. It’s your father, Dameron. He’s dead. It’s time to grow up now.”

II

The sea was violent, the wind blew fierce waves onto the rocky coast of Baronthee as the massive golden ship creaked its way toward the shore. Moran stood independently, braving the aforementioned harsh wind like a warrior facing a stampede of foes.

When the vessel docked, Balon hailed Moran from the top deck, and marched down to the port as his crew of slaves moored the boat. “Greetings!” shouted Moran with an air of great cunning. Moran was quite skilled, the best barterer in Baronthee (or possibly the entirety of Antenox). This is not why the Adeladia family requested his assistance specifically in this matter, however. Trading was not the only thing Moran was exceptionally skilled at.

Balon, however, was not a skilled barterer. He was not quite skilled at anything as a matter of fact. He was a mere fisherman, his only great attribute being the luck of the sea. "Apologies for arriving later than expected, though the difference may be only slight," said he.

Moran gestured toward Balon's ship. "I see you've already made great use of your findings". Balon turned and smiled at his craft. "Yes, I have," and then with a turn back to Moran, he added "But I've found myself... Wanting more. My thirst for the great luxuries of the rich man's life has grown even stronger with each passing day."

Moran was a man who did his research, in which he found many interesting and indeed manipulatable things about the fisherman. He had lived in a small and dilapidated shack for most of his life, though that was only because up until just recently, that's all that he could afford. He had no real family or friends. He was alone.

Just a fortnight previous, Balon came upon a treasure chest while fishing. Hidden deep in the vastness of the Baronian sea, it contained a great amount of treasure once thought to be lost to the endless mist of time. He had, in the span of just those fourteen days, sold and traded almost all of it away in exchange for a ship of great magnitude (covered in as much gold as Balon could coat it in without the risk of sinking), over a dozen slaves, more whores than Moran felt the need to interrogate, and a castle, just off the coast of Aseron. He, like all men when given the opportunity, had become yet another lazy, greedy ass of a man.

"So, where is he?" asked Balon, as if the trader knew exactly to whom he was referring. "Pardon?" asked Moran simply. "Sir Adeladia. Is he running late, or-"

"Master Adeladia will not be joining us, Balon." said Moran. "It is just you and me here." to which Balon seemed extremely disappointed. "Well then, this is all for nothing. I'll best be going." he said, and he turned and began to walk toward his ship-

"I can grant you anything..." and to this, Balon turned back to face Moran. "I have the same power as my master, he has granted me the privilege to give you whatever you'd like. However, I only will do so when you have first given me what you promised my master. And be warned, I will know if it is a fake." Moran said all of this and then smiled faintly. Moran was exceptionally skilled at lying.

And then Balon smiled and turned back to face his ship once again, this time calling to his slaves:

"Bring me the chest!" he called, and moments later, two crewmates came down from his ship carrying a wonderfully ornate solid-gold chest, on the sides of it were various gemstones of different colours and sizes. Moran knelt down in front of the chest. He closely inspected the gems on the sides of it. He ran his fingers along the stones before moving his hand up to the latch, which he undid.

Upon opening the chest, Moran saw a beautiful velvet midnight purple lining on the walls and floor of the interior. However, there was nothing inside it. Moran closed the chest again. "Strange request, huh?" said Balon with a smile, which Moran reciprocated. "Sure is. What exactly are you hoping to get out of this deal, by the way?" he asked. Balon seemed to think for a moment. "Well, I would like land,

Moran. Land here, in Baronthee. Lots of it. And I would also like five hundred more slaves to help build a great manor upon the land, and the materials that they shall need as well.”

Moran nodded. “Is that all?” he asked plainly. “No,” said Balon, “I would also like the most beautiful woman in Baronthee to occupy my new estate with me, and keep me company. Alice Adeladia.”

“Alice Adeladia is promised to another. The prince of Fridmont, Dameron Fridman.” said Moran with a slight smile. “You cannot have her,” he added finally.

“Then the deal is off. Take it away,” he said as he turned to the crewmates who brought out the chest.

“Not so fast,” said Moran quickly, placing his left hand on the chest before the two could take it away.

“Alice Adeladia is fourteen. You are thirty-three, and what’s more, you are nothing, and you will always be nothing.” finished Moran.

“Do not mistake my kindness for weakness,” said the fisherman. “I am not to be undermined.”

Moran laughed. “You are not kind. You are fragile, frail, fucking small. Weak is a great word for it, actually. And you undermined yourself by coming here, and bringing the treasure with you. And if you knew what you really found, you would have kept quiet. But you do not know what you’ve found. You know nothing of what you found for me. Goodbye, Balon of the Baronie Sea.”

It was a quick death. Balon went with a confused look on his face, before his muscles relaxed, subtly twitching, an empty face. A cold face.

The slaves were all freed immediately, and the crew was given a simple choice: join the ranks of the Adeladia family or follow Balon to the grave.

III

Valeria woke up chained by her waist to a post extruded from a wall in a dark dungeon.

“Good morning!” said a voice, which was recognizable as soon as he, an elderly man in a white cloak, lit his torch. “You didn’t sleep much. That’s okay, I didn’t expect you to. You had quite the night!” he said as he walked over to a small table.

“Why am I chained up?” asked Valeria. It was a fair question, she didn’t do anything wrong, after all.

“Your two friends are missing, and you were the last to be seen with them alive. Have you been bit? Scratched?”

“No, they... They didn’t touch me...” and then she and the stranger sat in silence for a moment. “I didn’t kill my friends.” she added. “I know that.” he responded quickly.

“Well, friend, now that I see all is well and you are no threat to me, I can unchain you.” and he did as he said, grabbing a rather large key from the table and walking over to Valeria, unlocking and removing the lock, freeing her. Briefly, Valeria wondered where he put the lock, as he didn’t seem to have a bag or a pocket to store it in, but her mind was overcrowded and that seemed to be the least of her concern.

“Who are you? Where am I?” she asked, before adding “What were those things? Am I in trouble?”

“Well, as for your third question, I do not know what those things are exactly, but I know what is in control of them. And I will tell you all about that in due time. As for your first question, I am a messenger sent from the Eternal Sorcerers. I am to help you get on the *right path*, so to speak. You are just outside of the town of Somberfell, under my tower. You are safe. And you are not in trouble. At least, you aren’t in trouble with the Eternal Sorcerers or, by extension, me. You may be in trouble with the imperials, but this is far beyond them, far more important than anything they have to deal with, if you catch my meaning.”

“I can’t say I do. What exactly is going on here?” asked Valeria. “I am conducting an investigation on the creatures that killed your friends, and the man who sent them,” replied the stranger, “and I need your help.”

23 Hours Ago

Sometimes I feel very sad. Sometimes I feel alone. Sometimes I feel as if all hope is lost. Ben’s been very helpful. I can’t recommend finding friends in odd places enough. Even if that odd place is a mental hospital. Because that’s the thing about the mental hospital, sometimes you meet someone and you just think *that cat’s something I can’t explain!*

Maybe the best time to find friends is when you aren’t looking at all. Sometimes life throws people your way, and you know, fairly quickly, that said person is going to be a part of your life. Sometimes platonically. Sometimes romantically. Sometimes sexually. Sometimes as your enemy. Sometimes they’re your worst-or one of your worst enemies, and you don’t know they’re your story’s antagonist until it’s too late.

It’s 9:00 at this point and all six of us -a rather scrawny young boy who already looked sickly as it was started foaming at the mouth (a clear sign of turning morbid, but you already knew that) and was taken to a “quiet room”- were walking to the gymnasium.

“Do you have children?” I asked Ben. “Yeah, five and a half billion of ‘em” said Ben with a smile. I laugh this off, not thinking much of it. He’s a weird guy, after all, all the best guys are. “How old are you exactly? I always assumed you were like thirty, but I guess I never asked you.” he grinned again. “I’m as old as you are, dude. You know I’m in your head, right?”

For a second, I believed him. That one got me good, and when it finally hit me I laughed. A good laugh. "You were close. I'm twenty-seven."

Around the time he says this we get to the gym.

Me, Ben, and the only two girls in the ward all decide to play four square. Ben wins.

We still have half an hour or so left, so I go into the far corner of the gym and continue reading my book while Ben talks to the girls.

God, I must have looked so pathetic, sitting there in my purple gown and grippy socks reading a cosmically spiritual occult treatise. But I didn't feel pathetic. I felt great.

22 Hours Ago - Discovery

Even if you never leave Neverland, eventually we all have to grow up.

You could say my entire life led up to discovering the numbers and writing my book.

You could also say anyone's entire life led up to any moment at all and you'd be just as correct.

But I found something even more perplexing 22 hours ago.

I was looking through the library when I found the crayon manifesto. I had somehow never seen it before.

Please see Appendix A2 for the completed manuscript. Originally scanned July 4, 1992 by John Galamore and attached as a .GIF file, we have used artificial intelligence to upscale the original attachment.

What was it? A script for a short film? Did another patient write this? Surely, as the handwriting leads me to visualize a broken mind, slaving away at their work for no one. The unorganized yet elegantly placed meter of the words is excellent, if this were published it would sell. No doubt.

time passing differently for a moment

I fear I am stuck on this. We've all been there, right? Where hours pass like minutes or seconds pass like hours? Do you ever feel that way? Another unanswered question.

The New King - Chapter Two

IV

The night was dark and full of terrors. The pair, Valeria and the stranger, were walking through a mushroom forest. It had been nine days since Valeria awoke chained to a post in a dungeon wall. “We are near the Temple of the Undying,” said the stranger. “It is there they drink the sacred drink.” They approached a bridge formed from rope and wood about ten feet above the ground. The bridge connected two houses each inside the caps of giant mushrooms, and beyond the bridge, more mushroom houses and bridges. “This village has been abandoned for some time. It once was home to the wood elves of the forest, not known by the common people and called the Arvwyndor by the fey. The temple resides closer with every step, we are almost there, but I must warn you Valeria. When we enter, no matter what you see, be respectful. The endless play tricks on mortals like you. You will only see what they want you to see, and nothing more. And anything and everything you encounter shall be a test of will.”

And they crossed a passage in the trees and there was the temple, a huge pyramid. Valeria wondered how she couldn’t see it from afar, even with the trees being ten feet tall, the temple was thirty if not more. It had a black staircase going down the sides, the rest of the pyramid a muddy yellow in color. The wizard in white led Valeria up the staircase at a steady, determined pace. When they reached the top, the wizard pulled a small lever and the platform (roughly five feet wide) began to descend down a square brick tube. Valeria had seen levers before, when she visited Fridmont, but nothing that could do what was being done at that moment. It must have been magic. It was the first time Valeria encountered anything magical. It was not the last time! The platform lowered at a steadily quick pace, and took far longer to reach the bottom than Valeria would have guessed.

When they reached the bottom and the chimney opened up to the rest of the temple, Valeria almost screamed, but remembered the stranger’s warning. The room, seemingly far larger on the inside than it was on the outside (by about 40 feet in each direction), housed around seven beings positioned in a circle around the center (the entrance), who appeared to be half-human and half-feline. Cat people. And the tallest one spoke first, in a language Valeria could not understand, but somehow she knew what the cat-woman was saying all the same.

“Hello, visitor. We are the faceless. We are the watchers, the visitors, and the guardians. Eternal guardians of the eternal spirit. We do not interfere, we do not make favorites. We only show mortals like you what lies in store for them, what the gravity -the weight- of their decisions entail. I am Yzona, the nameless.”

Valeria questioned in her mind’s eye for a moment how someone called the nameless could be named Yzona, but she was determined to be respectful, so she stayed silent.

And then the stranger spoke to Yzona the nameless in the same strange circular slithering vernacular, but this time Valeria could not comprehend. Was this on purpose?

Yzona nodded to a quick sentence-could you call it that? a sentence?-that the stranger hissed-a kind of hissing-and turned to walk a short-or long, it was dark in the temple, Valeria couldn't tell-distance to a table adorned with what looked like potions to Valeria.

"Valeria, we are brewers of the pure and sacred substance. What I am about to give you will not harm you, but it is a potion of the most potent sort, and will fill your heart with fear and possibly even pain of the soulful sort, temporarily." said Yzona as she picked up the smallest vial Valeria had ever seen and turned to face her before approaching. She handed Valeria the vial. "Are you ready?" she asked. The stranger responded before she could, "She is not ready. But she has to see." and he nodded at Valeria. She hesitated. "What exactly am I about to drink?"

"Pretend it's water. Drink quickly." said the wizard. And Valeria paused momentarily before drinking. It tasted like herbs or dirt. A hint of bullshit. A universe. A multiverse.

It began slowly, the visions. And the visions were not visual, they were only thoughts. And *thoughts can't hurt you*, thought Valeria dangerously. A young woman, with hands forming strange shapes. Beckoning, calling. She is to be made Queen, how Valeria knew that she could not say. In fact, she couldn't say anything. Or maybe she could, but it wouldn't do any good. She was alone. Utterly alone. She was out of time. Or was she? Not quite yet, there was still time. Time to save the world.

The cosmic truth... The turtle, named Warden, conveyed all of the information to Valeria quickly. Valeria knew the turtle well, she just didn't know she knew him. The turtle loved Valeria as the turtle loves all, greatly. Valeria knew she would meet the turtle again, how she knew she couldn't tell or say or know or think at all. She couldn't think at all. It was all happening so quickly -too quickly. Everything everywhere all at once.

The young woman marries the King. It doesn't make her happy. It doesn't save her mortal soul. She will not have a happy ending unless Valeria acts quickly, she knows. She knows all of this in this moment. The woman will not be saved unless Valeria saves her. It's all up to her now, she sees. She saw the King, sitting on his golden throne. A man in black was whispering in his ear. The King smiled. Time passed, a lot of time. The King was old, and drunk. He, still sitting on his throne, was holding a large glass of wine. He was surrounded by what Valeria, even in her innocence, knew to be whores. Laughing at the jokes they told him for a moment, quickly losing his smile as the Queen approaches. He was not a happy man. The Queen begs him, pleads to him, to barricade the city walls. *They're coming*. More time passed. He was still depressed, still alone. The man in black was back. He had a wicked grin on his face. He pointed toward the doors to the hall. The King has his men barricade the doors. Not the city gates. The doors to the King's own hall. He doesn't mind if the people die. He can't let *himself* be in danger though, can he? Outside, the creatures, the same creatures that killed

Oliver and Nikolas, ravage the city. Thousands of innocents slaughtered. The King drinks his ale as he hears the screaming outside. He was not a happy man.

The barricade doesn't last long. They're coming. Quickly. The pillars are breaking down as the monsters' decrepit hands flap through the doorway madly, grasping at the sides of the door, pushing it open further. Valeria is powerless. The man in black laughs and turns his back on the King, fleeing down a dark corridor.

And right as the creatures completely break on through to the other side, Valeria's vision fades away and she is suddenly face to face with Yzona. "What did you see?" she asks.

"I think I saw the future."

21 Hours Ago - In the Shower

We tend to only see the tip of the iceberg with people. We only see what they want us to see. Not me. You're reading me right now. This is me, all of me. I am a glass house. I wouldn't hide from you. I wouldn't mislead you, I wouldn't exaggerate or minimize anything, and I definitely wouldn't lie to you. I love you, after all. Love is the only way. I've figured this out. We take a shower daily at 11. I go last, because the techs like me, and let me take a long shower. I love showering, I use the time to meditate. So at 11:45 I go into the shower room, it's essentially a box of a room with one big shower head on the ceiling. I turn the knob to the coldest setting, I love cold showers.

I sit down in the middle of the room on the floor. My mind races from what I found in the library-closet to my book, and eventually-as my mind always returns to them-the numbers.

Don't be afraid. Don't be as afraid as I am, at least. Because I am too afraid, all the time. I'm so scared I could cry, but I'm too terrified to even do that.

"Hello"

It wasn't a question, it was a statement. It sounded as if it were spoken by a girl, a little girl. From the drain. The voice spoke again.

"Can he hear us? Yes."

Fear and guilt are sisters. I didn't know what to say. She was clearly talking about me. I was afraid. I was disoriented. I was alone. And still I am alone.

"It's the one he told us about. He's just like all the rest of them. He can't help us. Yes he can."

I felt weak. I felt a desperate tightness in my chest. I was alone. I was grasping. Grasping for what, you can only guess. I am running out of words. Or perhaps I have more, but why? and for what?

"Stephen, are you about done?"

"Yes ma'am."

I think I'm done going through my day with you. Nothing much of note ever really happens here.

The New King - Chapter Three

V

Alice did not want to leave home. She didn't want to marry the prince, and she didn't want to be Queen. The ship was swaying back and forth, as was her mind. Her soul. On one hand, her teachings taught her change was good and makes you a stronger person. On the other hand, she did not know this boy. She did not know his people. She knew Baronthee, and the Baronic people. She was confused, in more ways than one.

There was a knock on her cabin door. Alice recognized the voice as belonging to Moran, a wise and powerful mentor of hers. "Master Adeladia, your father is calling for you to join us in the dining hall." "Be right there," said Alice shortly.

She wandered the rocking halls and finally found herself in the dining hall. Her father, drunk, yelled aloud "And there she is! My wonderful- erm- daughter, soon to be- urm- Queen! Come sit with me- ah- Alice, you special... girl! You crazy diamond! Oh, how I love you. Did you know that? Did you know I love you? Come, have some wine! You deserve it."

Alice let out a polite giggle. "I love you too, dad." and she approached the table her father was sitting at with Moran and two others, Axley and Holdus, record keepers. Alice sat down next to Moran and her father handed her a glass and attempted to pour wine into it from a leather wineskin. He missed the mark greatly, pouring wine all over Moran, who simply laughed. "Erm- um- apologies, Mobly- arm- Moran. Oh, my! You are really drunk, aren't you? You leaned right into that pour!" he said as he- this time successfully- poured Alice her first glass of wine, ever.

"This time, open the window. The sharks would like some too, I'd guess." said Moran.

There was silence across the table for a moment. A small distance away, the other table's conversations turned into a murmur, and then silence fell upon them, too. Alice's father finished his pour slowly, and turned to stare into Moran's soul. He was not a violent man, but that was known to change when he was drunk. Alice was worried her father would hit Moran. Or worse.

"Where in the nine hells is my wife?" he roared and stood up, presumably to look for her, and everyone laughed and returned to their conversations. Moran smiled and winked at Alice.

“So, how do you feel? Are you excited?” he asked. Axley and Holdus turned to her, interested. “Quite.” Alice said quickly. She had to lie. Moran was close with her father, and Axley and Holdus, if they heard any contradictions or complaints, would surely go straight to the patriarch. She picked up her glass of wine and drank. And there was silence before Sir Adeladia called out loudly from his cabin, just outside the dining hall. “Axlus, Holdumley! Come quick! I want you to transcribe this- erm- how do you say it- fork vacation!” and Axley and Holdus looked at each other and there was a strange look that Alice didn’t understand, coming close to fear or dread or something in that camp. And they got up and grabbed their papers and quills and ink vials slowly as they could. Moran laughed. “Have fun.” he said sarcastically, and Alice looked at him with a look of confusement but he simply shook his head. “You don’t want to know. Now, more importantly. Tell me how you really feel.”

Alice looked even more confused now. “About the wedding.” and she understood. “Oh, well, I’m happy. Happy to do the right thing for our houses.” and Moran gave her an almost sympathetic, sad look. He looked down at her hands. “You don’t have to lie to me. You fidget when you lie.” and Alice dropped her hands under the table and smiled in shame and embarrassment. “Oh, well,” and Moran leaned in so he could better hear her over the roaring laughter and conversation that engulfed the room. “I guess I’m torn. I am excited on some level, but what if he turns out to be an ass? What if he doesn’t like me? What if he beats me? What if-”

“What if it’s true love?” chimed in Moran hopefully. “I wish you had a choice, and we both know if you did you wouldn’t choose this. But unfortunately you don’t have a choice. So all you can do is be cautiously optimistic and hopeful. Sure, he may be an ass. I promise you this however, he will love you. I’ve had the pleasure of teaching you the ways of persuasion, and the general teachings of the immortal soul. I have watched you grow. And you have grown into the most lovely lady there is or ever was. Yes, a lovely spirit. You will do great things, and anyone would be lucky to have you. And if he hits you, I don’t care if he’s King. I’ll put him in his place. And that’s putting it lightly.”

“Moran, will you stay with me in Fridmont? It would mean the world to me to have a friend. Someone I know...”

And Moran smiled. “I’m sure we can make something work. I’ll speak with your father.”

VI

“People- good people- fair people of Fridmont... It is my duty- to serve- now that my father has... now that things have changed... it is my responsibility... No, I sound like a fucking idiot. I can’t do this.” Dameron was frustrated. He had been practicing the address Kieran wrote him for hours on end now, and while the majority of it was complete, he was tasked with composing his introduction to the people as the new King. “Why can’t you just tell me what to say?”

“Because you have to strike a chord in the hearts of the people. And emotional solidarity, the integrity of your heart and soul, must be preserved at all costs. You have to do this. Not for me. Not for them. Not for your mother. But for you.” and Dameron understood.

“Kieran?” Dameron asked in a way that he had never had about him before. “Yes, Dameron?” replied the man in the way he always had. “I don’t miss him. Am I a monster?”

There was silence for a moment. Kieran looked at the boy with great love and care. “No, you are no monster. You are a boy- no- you are a man, and you are shaping up to be a good one. Your father was not a good man. And you can’t tell anyone I said this. They’d kill me. But in all honesty, I don’t miss him either.”

“He’s still coming to terms with it all. He’s making great progress. I told him to take some time to meditate.” said Kieran to Celia. “We’re all alone.”

They were in the Queensroom, a large suite where the Queen-or now, Queen Mother, slept. Soon it would house a different Queen, and Celia would live in one of the many other rooms the castle held. She didn’t like that. But she was a goblet-half-full kind of woman.

Kieran attempted to pull the laces off Celia’s dress. “No,” she said, “not right now.” and Kieran frowned. “Then when? It’s been nine nights. I’m getting restless...” and the Queen Mother let out a harsh laugh. “You can wait nine more, or a hundred more, if I so please.”

“You would be *so pleased* if you let me touch you-”

“It’s wrong. It’s so wrong.” said Celia. “But it feels so right,” began Kieran, “How is it wrong, fair lady? He’s dead, Celia. It sure felt right when he was still here, but he’s gone now, so what have we?”

“We have *had* an affair. And it’s over. And we will carry our secret to the ashes. Nobody will ever know, for it will not continue. And it *won’t* continue, because I *say* it won’t.” she was in tears.

“As you wish, my love.” he said as he turned to the door. “*Don’t call me that!*” whispered Celia to the back of his balding head. It was almost a scream, or a yell, or a cry. Kieran turned and smiled sadly. “But that’s what you are. That’s who you are. I will serve you to the grave. My heart beats for you.”

“You make me crumble completely.” she said. Celia approached the man, who was far shorter than her.

“Okay...” she began as the couple kissed. “one last time.” she said as she undid her laces.

Dream Log - Another Nightmare

It was a late night, I was counting out my stitches, laying by the side of the road. I was a long time gone, feeling like it’s time to go home. No, not home. My apartment.

So I approached my apartment with a sense of foreboding. With great fear I walked seven miles.

And there was a great dread that came with all that. It was all too much. So much, in fact, that I vomited as I walked. And even still I didn't stop.

I was worried. Worried it had come true. My premonition. Of what? Exactly. What.

It.

That.

Dandelions and daffodils were no more. And gone are cups of tea under sunny skies. The only light in my life was the lightning protruding from dark stormy heavens. Or, a more proper term but technically incorrect, hells.

And I finally reached my destination. Not finally as in I was eagerly anticipating reaching it. Perhaps I was eager, but in a frightened manner. I was terrified.

I couldn't help myself. It was like I was watching a movie. A really, really scary movie. The Exorcist. The Shining. And if I could shine... Well, I don't think much would be different.

And I came to the door.

And I walked through the door.

And I walked on down the hall.

And I came to another door.
And I looked inside.

I never liked my landlord. He was a strange guy. Hell, I'm a strange guy, too, but not like him. He hung a confederate flag on a pole outside the building. As if that wasn't bad enough, he also had a Benjamin Williams campaign sign permanently affixed in the front lawn. I only lived there because it was the cheapest I could find. I was ashamed to bring women home, and I didn't have the few friends that I had over. But I never wished him dead. I've never wished anyone dead, besides, perhaps, you.

I wish I could say dream me was confused when I saw him hanging from my ceiling, limp and lifeless against my back wall. But I wasn't confused. I knew what had happened. I don't...

I don't remember what happened now. And that's the truth. I don't know why he was hanging. And I don't know why there was an amalgamation of body parts-infant body parts-burning on the floor in a smokestack, the flesh melting together to form a mass-a ball-of human suffering. The child-or children, it could have been more than one, I honestly don't know- was long dead, ripped apart, but I could still hear her screaming. And the text on the wall behind my landlord, painted in blood...

we all die young

It surely can't mean nothing.

There's a reason I dreamed this. There is a secret to decode.

I wish I had your help. Remember when we were a team? It felt like nothing could stop us.
When you get hit with nothing, it does that. Stops you, I mean.