

Down the Rabbit Hole

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Mark shifted his weight as he carefully swung himself over the fence. He bent his knees as he dropped to the ground. Staying crouched he began to move quickly across the compound. Mark edged up to the side of the building, standing all the way up now. Mark didn't think there would be guards but to be safe he had stayed crouched till arrived at the building. Clouds began to cover the night sky, putting out the light of the stars and moon. Mark reached into his backpack and pulled out his headlight. He listened to the sound of his footsteps as he walked along the pavement. It was the only sound in the night.

Confident that no one was around Mark yelled, "Hello! Anyone there!"

There was no response. Just the wind. Mark decided it was probably okay to throw caution to the wind and stop sneaking around. He ran to the front of the warehouse to find an entrance. He was surprised to see that the front door had already been broken open. The chain that had held it closed was lying on the ground. Mark approached the entrance cautiously. You never knew who else was going to break into abandoned buildings. Best case scenario it was another explorer, worst case gang members or junkies.

Mark held his flashlight out.

"Hello is anyone there?"

If it was gang members or junkies he didn't want to surprise them. He was going to give them as much warning as possible. Mark went through the door. The warehouse

was completely empty. Mark was disappointed. The factory had done a pretty good job of clearing out everything. He was at least expecting a box of junk or something.

As Mark was swinging his flashlight across the warehouse he noticed an open hatch in the center of the room. Mark started to get excited. The basement had to have been a part of the original foundation. There had to be something interesting down there. As Mark approached the hatch he was startled by a sound behind him. He turned around quickly but didn't see anything. As he turned back someone, something came from his side and ran into him. Mark fell down the hatch.

Mark instinctively put his hand to his forehead. Opening his eyes he wondered where he was. He was lying on dirt. As he looked around he noticed that he was in a tunnel. At first he thought he was under the warehouse but looking up he noticed that there was no hatch opening anywhere. Torches lined the side of the tunnel. Off in the distance Mark heard someone walking and talking to themselves.

"My, my haven't had anybody fall down here for a while. Started to think all the gates had been sealed. Oh well goes to show you that you should never assume the state of affairs."

A man dressed in a wrinkled white dress up shirt covered by a purple vest approached Mark. The man walked with a cane which he immediately started poking Mark with.

"Eh, are you the new arrival?"

Mark scrambled up off the ground.

"Will you stop poking me with that thing?!"

“Just making sure you’re what I was expecting”

“By poking me?”

“You’d be surprised the things you can discern from a good poke.”

“I don’t even... Where am I?”

“You’re in the Sphere of Victor in the Conglomeration.”

“What?”

“Hard of hearing are you? I SAID YOU’RE IN THE...”

“Stop! I heard what you said. I mean what do you mean by the Sphere of Victor in the Conglomeration.”

“What do you mean what do I mean? I find what I said to be quite self-explanatory.”

“Well not to me. Whatever. What’s your name? Does that involve something that makes sense?”

“I am Chester.”

Chester outstretched his hand. Mark shook it.

“I’m Mark.”

A growling sound began to emanate from down the tunnel.

“What was that?” Mark asked.

“Oh dear, I should have known they were guarding the gateways.”

Mark began to see the source of the sound. There were creatures of black mud shambling towards them. They looked human in shape but nothing else. At first they were approaching slowly but then they started picking up speed.

“Uh we may want to start running.” Chester said.

“No argument from me.”

They bolted in the opposite direction just as the horde started running full speed at them. Mark looked back and couldn't distinguish between any of the forms. As the horde rushed at them it had become one giant mass.

“What are those things?” Mark said.

“Decrepits”

“What are Decrepits?”

Chester stopped, “Well Decrepits are...”

“What are you doing?”

“You asked a question that requires a thoughtful and organized answer. It was only polite for me to stop and compose myself.”

“We're about to be trampled!”

“Didn't your mother ever teach you manners?”

Mark grabbed Chester just as a portion of the mass smashed itself into the wall next to them.

“My mother taught me not to get killed.”

Chester poked the side of the tunnel with his cane. A hole formed around it.

“Here go through here?”

“Where does it go?”

“I don't know.”

“You expect me to go through without knowing where it is going?”

“That's life, why is this different?”

“What? Whatever, what about you?”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve had to dodge some Decrepits. They have been showing up a lot more lately. Is the time approaching? No can’t be or else you wouldn’t have arrived. The fairies always close all the gates when the time is approaching.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Never mind,” Chester pushed Mark through the hole. Mark saw Chester get smashed to the ground. Mark began to tumble down a winding slide. Finally he stopped. He couldn’t stand up in this new tunnel. There was only enough room to sit or crawl. It was pitch black. Mark couldn’t move. He couldn’t believe what was happening. What was going on? He was startled by something shuffling in the darkness.

“If there’s anyone there I’ve got a weapon.”

“Liar”

Suddenly the tunnel was filled with light. Mark saw a man hunched several feet away from him. The man had long hair and a rather unkempt beard. Mark got a whiff of something rotting. The light was coming from something the man held.

“And who are you?”

“I’m the Hobo.”

“The Hobo?”

“Yes you can call me the Hobo.”

“Is nothing normal around here?”

“I’m afraid not. Why are you down here?”

“We were attacked by the Decrepits.”

“Oh dear.”

“What are they? I never got a straight answer from Chester.”

The Hobo started laughing.

"I doubt you would that is a very strange fellow, even before his time here.

Anyways the Decrepits are those who dwelt too much on something they lost."

"So they used to be like us."

"Yes but over time their minds became so preoccupied with sorrows and twisted into what you saw."

"Where am I?"

"This is the Sphere of Victor in the Conglomeration."

"Yes but what does that mean!?"

"The Conglomeration is a collection of spheres all ruled by a particular person. This sphere is ruled by Victor. The next closet sphere would be ruled by Bob. So the Sphere of Bob. The Conglomeration was set up and maintained by the fairies."

"Fairies? Are you fucking kidding me?"

"All the spheres are filled with people who fell through the doorways connecting the Conglomeration with your physical world."

"What for?"

"Who knows, maybe for entertainment? They usually don't interact with any of the inhabitants though. Only the rulers of each sphere interact with the fairies."

"Is there any way to get back to my world?"

"Possibly, it has been known to happen from time to time but only very rarely."

"Well then let's get started. Show me a way out of these tunnels."

The Hobo turned around and started leading Mark. They didn't get very far before the Hobo disappeared and Mark was left in the dark. Mark reached out trying to

feel for his way or the Hobo. It was too late before Mark realized that the tunnel he was crawling in bent downward. He wasn't able to catch himself and went tumbling down.

Mark felt something tickling his face. Opening his eyes he saw another set looking right back at him. It was a young woman. She was sitting on top of him and her black hair was dangling across his face. The woman smiled at him.

"He's awake," she said.

Mark realized he had an erection and she was sitting right on top of it. He looked to see what she was wearing. She was wearing a dark blue night gown. He didn't think she was wearing anything underneath it. She started bouncing slightly. That wasn't helping.

"It's been so long since we had someone new!" she said.

Mark grabbed her and rolled her off to the side. He quickly got up and tried to put some distance between him and her. He saw that the Hobo was sitting nearby. The Hobo started laughing.

"Got some morning wood there?" he said.

"Shut up," Mark said.

"What's a morning wood?" the young woman asked.

Mark coughed.

"Um its nothing. The Hobo is just being an ass."

The Hobo couldn't stop laughing. Mark made sure he stayed turned away from the young woman. He closed his eyes and held his breath. Mark tried forcing the blood flow anywhere but his penis.

“Are you done wilting there?” the Hobo said.

“Yea I’m good.”

Mark took the moment to become more aware of his surroundings. They were in a garden of some kind. The Hobo was sitting under a tree that had purple leaves. The land around had red grass that went up to his ankles. The young woman was preoccupied with a flying insect.

“Am I dead?” Mark asked the Hobo.

“Depends on what you mean by dead?”

“What?”

“Well your world believes that death is the event when your physical body stops functioning. But some part of you still survives to go on somewhere. So really does anyone die? It’s really more of a transfer. You still exist, just in a different state.”

Mark sat down on the ground.

“So I am dead. Why did I end up here? What about Heaven or Hell?”

“Such places exist but if a person dies near one of the doorways then you end up somewhere in the Conglomeration.”

“You said I could go back.”

“You could but you would return as a disembodied spirit. No, the best thing to do is to stay here and accept your new existence.”

“You said the Decrepits were those who became too preoccupied with something they lost. They’re souls who couldn’t let go of the past, who couldn’t move on from the world they came from.”

The young woman came over and wrapped herself around Mark.

“I like the way you smell, it makes me feel safe.”

“And who is she supposed to be?” Mark asked the Hobo.

“That’s Alice and this is her garden.”

“All mine, Victor gave it to me when I first arrived.”

“Alice? I knew an Alice once when I was a kid. We used to exploring together.”

Mark said.

“Why did you stop?” the Hobo said.

“Her family moved away.”

“Liar”

“I am not.”

“Liar, liar pants on fire!”

“Will you shut up!”

Before the Hobo could say anything back the group was interrupted by the arrival of Chester. He was heavy with sweat and his clothes had become tattered.

“I see we are having a little tea party.” he said.

“I see you just came out of the shitter,” the Hobo replied.

Chester ignored the Hobo and sat down on the ground, “I don’t understand.

There are so many of them now, is it our time? But that doesn’t make sense. If it’s our time we shouldn’t be getting any new arrivals, all the doors should be closed.”

“Looks like our friend is lost in himself,” the Hobo said.

“What is he talking about?” Mark asked.

“Sounds like ramblings to me. You two take a walk. I’ll try to make him a bit more coherent.”

Alice pulled on Mark, "Come on I want to show you something."

Mark did little to resist. A walk is just what he needed right now. It was odd but the fact that he was dead was the last thing on his mind. It was where he ended up. The afterlife was so much stranger than he had ever thought, not that he had given it much thought before. He thought it would be boring but this, this was exciting!

"You're smiling," Alice said.

"I'm actually kind of happy, an odd thing to say when you're dead. But this isn't what I pictured would happen when I died. I like this."

"What did you think it would be like?"

"I don't know Heaven, Hell, nothing, boring."

They stopped walking. They had come to a giant enclosure that was made up entirely of trees and shrubs. Mark saw that it circled around basically making a giant dome out of plants. The leaves constantly changed color, from a light blue to a dark velvet. Mark tried to see what was in the center but the foliage was too thick. Alice grabbed Mark's hand. They started running towards the center of the structure. They came to a circular clearing. A massive tree stood in the center. Its branches must have stretched over the entire structure.

"What is this place?" Mark asked.

"It's the center of my garden. When I first came here I was so afraid. Victor asked me what would make me feel safe. I told him and he made it for me. Whenever I felt afraid I would come here to be safe. He said nothing could hurt me here."

"It's beautiful. You imagined this?"

"Yes"

“Amazing”

Alice wrapped herself around Mark again, “I don’t know why but you make me feel safe.”

Mark didn’t say anything but he felt a certain sense of familiarity about her.

“Do people age here?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Grow old, age, get wrinkles or do people more or less stay the same here?”

“I think I’ve been the same since I got here. I don’t think I’ve changed or gotten older.”

“But people change right? I mean the Hobo and Chester can’t have always looked the way they do? They were human once. What did they look like when they first arrived?”

“You think too much.”

Alice grabbed Mark by the back of the head and kissed him. Mark lost all sense of his surroundings. The moment overtook his mind. He felt pressure building up in his head. As the kiss lasted longer the pressure built. The pressure wasn’t painful it was pleasurable in a weird sort of way. Mark thought his head was going to explode. Finally the pressure reached its breaking point. Mark felt like someone had banged their hands against the side of his head. He fell to the ground. For a few moments his vision was clouded by searing white. As he regained his vision he could see white petals falling around them. Alice danced around the tree.

“What the hell just happened?”

“Sometimes things can be experienced here differently. I wanted to know what it felt like to kiss.”

“Well it was certainly unique.”

Mark ran his hand along the back of his head. It was sore. Everything around him seemed more vibrant. Their moment was interrupted when the Hobo and Chester came running.

“The Decrepits are behind us.” Chester said.

“What are we going to do?” Mark asked.

“The Hobo and I will try to buy you and Alice some time. You have to get to Victor.”

Chester walked over to the tree and poked it with his cane. A pathway opened up.

“This will take you to a valley. On the other side of the valley is the entrance to Victor’s palace.”

“Will you guys be alright?”

Chester didn’t look at Mark. He unsheathed a sword from his cane. The Hobo pulled out what looked like a molotov cocktail from his coat.

“There’s too much to explain. But you shouldn’t be here. No one should be. Our time is over. Now hurry!”

Before Mark could object Chester was pushing Mark and Alice through the portal.

It was cold. Snow covered the landscape. Mark wrapped himself around Alice to keep her warm. He could feel her shivering under him.

“This isn’t right,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“This valley it’s supposed to be beautiful, like the best of summer.”

“While I wouldn’t exactly call this summer.”

Mark tried to move them but they were both so cold that they couldn’t move for very long. A few steps and they stopped, shivering into each other’s bodies. Mark turned his head to see a black mass off in the distance moving towards them.

“Shit. The Decrepits are here.”

Alice turned and looked. She turned back towards Mark and started kissing him on his neck.

“What are you doing?”

“I told you things are experienced here differently. Trust me. You have to forget about them. We have to lose ourselves.”

“What do you—”

Alice stuck her hand down Mark’s pants. Mark didn’t really understand what was happening but if he was going to die, again, why not go with the flow of things. Mark put his hands under Alice’s gown and placed them on her ass. He drew her closer and kissed her.

The heat from their bodies melted the snow around them. Neither noticed the dry ground them as they hit it. Mark had pulled down Alice’s gown exposing her breasts. He pulled back on her hair. It felt like there was a great electrical charge running along his spine, its power emanating and pulsating around him. He felt like he was going to burst out of his body, like someone who had been tied up for centuries finally set free.

Mark no longer perceived him and Alice as physical bodies but as energy. They had started to become intertwined, each pushing and pulling. Tendrils of light danced between them as they became lost in each other's ecstasy. It was becoming harder and harder to hold onto any sense of self-awareness. It was just pleasure, light, heat. They started pulsating within each other building to something. The pressure became too much and waves of energy began to burst from them.

By the time Mark regained any sort of self-awareness their surroundings had changed. The snow had been replaced by a lush valley teeming with what could only be described as psychedelic butterflies. Mark realized he was standing naked drenched in sweat. He looked to his side and saw Alice lying in the grass smiling up at him. They quickly got dressed.

"Now what?" Mark said.

"Victor," was all Alice said and she started running. As Mark followed her he noticed piles of black mud black on the ground. A couple of times he thought some of them had started moving. They reached an archway of twisted branches and flowers. It was just sitting out in the open.

"What is this?"

"This will take us to Victor."

Mark thought he heard something behind them. He turned and saw that the mud he had seen earlier had started fusing together. Alice grabbed his hand and pulled him through the archway.

They were standing in a large hall. It didn't look like anyone had been here for a while. Dust covered the floor and cobwebs draped the ceiling. Sitting at the end of the hall was a throne that looked old and beaten.

"I don't understand. Where's Victor!" Alice said.

The large doors behind them burst open. Chester and the Hobo came running through. Mark saw a large mass behind them. It looked like the Decripts had fused into one big gelatinous beast. The Hobo slammed the doors shut. There was a loud thud as the beast smashed against the door. The Hobo started sprinting towards the throne. Alice screamed after him.

"Where's Victor! He's always here!"

Alice was on the verge of tears. Mark went to hold her. The doors couldn't hold out any longer against the beast. It entered the hall with a roar that shook it. Chester stood in front of Mark and Alice with his sword drawn.

The beast made a makeshift arm and brought it down on Chester. Chester swung slicing the arm causing it to fly and splatter against the wall. It oozed down and began to reform as a smaller separate creature.

"Alice we need to move away."

"No we can't leave Chester"

"There's nothing we can do."

"Go Alice! We have always protected you here. Now get to Victor." Chester said.

"Victor isn't here!" Alice screamed.

A voice boomed from the other end of the hall.

"This is my home and you will not hurt the ones I am pledged to protect!"

As the Hobo sat down in the throne his raggedy clothes dripped away and were slowly replaced by fancier attire. His face became clean shaven and his hair slicked back and became shorter. A light began to emanate from the throne that pierced the hall. It ripped the beast into pieces, leaving it as several lifeless piles on the floor.

Alice rushed towards the man now sitting in the throne. He stood up to embrace her hug.

“Victor what’s happening?”

“The end”

Mark wanted answers. He approached the throne.

“Who are you? How did you end up here?”

“I am Victor. A long time ago I was a child in a village. A plague came. A certain man offered his services to rid us of this plague. Once the plague was gone the adults refused to pay him. As punishment he took their children. He took us. The fairies observed like they always do. When they saw what he, that thing, was going to do. Even they couldn’t stand by and let that kind of perversion happen.

“They rescued us in a way. We were already dead so they set up little worlds that we could each have. All the spheres in the Conglomeration were like playgrounds for us. The only thing the fairies said we had to do was to care for and protect the souls that fell into our worlds until our end came.”

“What do you meant till your end came?”

“All souls must be reborn. We all knew one day the Conglomeration was going to come to an end. As each sphere was about to fall the fairies closed off the doors to our worlds so no new souls would have to face that end.”

“But then why did I end up here?”

Victor looked at Alice and smiled.

“Alice was the last soul to fall into my world. She was just a child.”

“But she said people don’t age here.”

“Souls age as they want to age here. She told me of a boy, a friend she used to go exploring with. One day on one their explorations she fell and died.”

Victor looked at Mark. Mark felt tears on his face. They were his own.

“I didn’t want to remember. I was just a kid. It hurt.”

“When I found out about your death I made sure your soul came here. As one last favor from the fairies. For Alice.”

“But what was the point? If this world is falling apart won’t Alice and I just end up being reborn. We’ll just be separated again.”

Victor turned around and looked at the throne.

“This throne is also a doorway out of the Conglomeration. Beyond it are all of the worlds of the fairies. You could run and explore as long as you want before your own time comes to reenter the cycle of rebirth.”

Victor touched the throne and it transformed into a swirling column of light.

“Walk through there and you’ll be free.”

They all turned to look at the end of the hall. The beast was slowly putting itself back together.

“Come with us.” Alice said.

“I can’t. The fairies won’t let me go through. My time has come.”

With tears Alice kissed Victor on the cheek.

“Thank you.”

Alice turned to Chester, “And thank you.”

Chester bowed.

“It has been a pleasure my lady.”

Chester stepped down from the throne platform and started moving towards the raging beast.

“Sir I believe it’s time for our last fight!”

“Can’t think of anyone else I’d rather go out with,” Victor moved away from Mark and Alice to join Chester, “Happy adventuring you two!”

Mark and Alice emerged on a cliff side. It over looked a massive valley filled with trees and vegetation of various colors. The skies were streaked with neon wisps. Balls of light bounced about them.

“Where to?” Mark asked.

Alice pointed to a skinny mountain in the distance that stretched high. A top it floated what looked an ornate monastery.

“There,” she said.

They clasped hands and went off for their first adventure.