

Celia 0

“Cwm fjordbank glyphs vext qiz”

~ Indefinite news headline

I was led into a white, nondescript room similar to those depicted in the movies. Like that one movie with the false realities. Except, I was almost certain I wasn't dreaming. Despite the fact I'd never seen this room before, I was positive that this was all real. Honestly, even now, I feel my sense of reality slipping.

So, I was able to piece together three things: I had arrived in a park in Welland, it's at least 2018, and this bench did not belong here. I mean, I definitely send my condolences to whoever Herman Whitman is. I'd simply hate to inform the person who had to commission this bench that it disappears at random intervals. Like it's a hologram or something. So I stood there, pondering the implications of a possibly-existing bench in Welland. Or was it Whitehorse?

I had no right to be there. No right to mess with the lines of entropy. I'll never know why, it seems as if the heavens played some vile jape atop my God-fearing ka. They placed me in a party I had no place to attend, after the events that started this all. I'm beholden for my job, yet I knew none of this was meant to happen.

Absent from time. Ha! It's a hex, is what it is. And... I'm getting ahead of myself. I do that sometimes. Okay, a lot. It's hard to get it all straight. Especially with me. I promise the next passage'll make marginally more sense.

My eyes opened and I hit my head. Not hard, yet it still mildly pained me. It was dark. Why was it dark? I took a moment to take in all I saw nearby. I wasn't able to see the clock, so, not clear on the time. A calendar nearby had all its pages ripped; it's the new year. Which new year, I hadn't the foggiest. A table of drinks, and an empty bottle on the floor. Not broken, so maybe 'spin-the-bottle'? The place was worn down, yet was recently filled. Where did everyone go? Home, probably. The idea of home once enticed me, too.

I kept walking. I kept thinking that a bar need not be this long, still I was walking regardless. The hallway felt never-ending. Maybe they knew how to bend all of space-time and have looped this area into itself. To be fair, I've seen weirder in Stella's apartment, if one can even call it that. After a metaphorical two-million years, that hypothesis proved to be incorrect. Finally, I came across a bend in the path, lit by a small, flickering light.

I wondered what it might've been like if I went back. If I had the ability to go back, that is. What'd happen if I denied myself, stayed with him, hadn't been so open. Then again, what good is there romancing a dead woman. I think she's dead by now, anyway. If she's not, I don't think she'd like what I've become. Or always been.

I'd rather not delve into details on what happened exactly. There are some things I'd rather keep to myself, however little there is to begin with. I hope this decision on my part won't hinder the overall reading experience. After all, it's not like I can lie on the spot here.

The white abyssal void drives people crazy, fine. Even so, it does not force people to betray their morals. At least, I hope so.

The concrete edifice is very bland to the eyes. It doesn't strike anyone as inapposite, I mean, that's how every place looks here. I don't know, it's still weird that this large stone slab with a lambent light plastered on it detracts attention so often that no one lacks conviction in what this facility's primary goals are. If I may be cliché, looks can be deceiving. Anyway, where was I?

I went on working in the same English town, not like it matters. Each day, to and fro, my brain racks itself for any semblance of comprehension as to why they're doing this. Doing this to me. I tried going by an ethics board. There isn't one. Might've ticked me off in my earlier days, now I find it no bother. What else is there to do, I don't want to get fired. This is the only place for a reasonable income where I live; I have no right to complain with regard to what I'm doing. No, my safety is not being endangered, nor is my health at any drastic risk. I think.

In the distance, a car materialized. As the shadowed driver stepped onto the pavement, I realized. She's looking for someone. Not me, not in a million years; she's looking for her sister. She's holding onto hope, for a better tomorrow, or for twenty-some years of bonding. I stepped into the dark. I know how this ends.

My eyes alerted me to a piece of paper on the tile below. Perhaps someone dropped it? I read it over. And again. And once again. I wasn't able to believe it. This was the party, the party of a lifetime, very literally for some. Sorry, hang on. December 2004, I was invited to a New Year's celebration. A few of my friends too; Stella, Isaac, Bill, and Nell were sent their invitations. Bill was the one of the only ones to show, and... well, I never saw him again. Start the dramatic chords, it's a mystery!

I fell into a spiral of heliocentric heliotropes. Or towards the majestic magenta magistrates. Have I been good or evil? I was thinking I'm finally dying. Dying a slow, painless death in a tantalizing Tophet, being assessed on my misdeeds and merits alike. The end of an era. However, as is evident, or maybe not, the story doesn't end here.

Except it wasn't. It really, really wasn't. Bill's not dead, he's simply... not Bill anymore. Apparently the work of one A. Atkin, a name I legitimately believed was a joke, a prank. No, her name was right there, right at the bottom of the sheet. She was gone for a long time. I had missed her.

I nearly toppled over as my entire field of vision was once more depleted by a swarm of periwinkle points, swirling over me while roses swallowed my senses. This time, I took it for what it probably was; a trip. A comparatively tame one, at least when compared to whatever Bill did. Whirled and twirled, boiled and coiled, swam in a sea of ethereal emptiness... it's a pattern, what else was there to do?

It was something ever so slightly familiar, as if I'd hopped back to my normal reality, if ever briefly. The alabaster-like walls, the faint whir of machines, and the horrifying realization of what had befallen this place. I always knew the Project was doing some illegal

activities, I mean, the name even says that! What, do they think no one'll notice? No, what got me with this whole state of affairs were the glass prisons. Maybe reality is stranger than fiction.

I'm not dead. Maybe. Perhaps I died back there and I'm in limbo. Instead of the heavenly gates my book promised, I arrived in a very familiar setting. Of a door that's far too small. Of a table with bottled death and cake atop. And of a chart of the Qabalistic archangels. That one's from my childhood. Ah, the tales that once instilled whimsy now come back to bite me.

I hesitantly resigned from my reverie. Can't be daydreaming all the time. I stepped away from the chambers, looking back towards the entrance to the room. Except... where was it? I rapidly took to tapping, the walls immovable despite every action. I pivoted to lean against the constricting borders, only to find there were none. A room of green pillars replaced by an open space, filled with machinery, in an instant. The near-silent pops from the stasis chambers were no more. Instead, I sensed something important.

Like that, it was gone. I'm not so certain what I was thinking, only that I was thinking far too hard on something or other. To the point I almost crashed into a park bench. I stopped for a second to read the engraving. Now, I'm not typically one to pay any mind to those slabs of info at galleries. However, considering how my day had been so far, some context tidbits might've been nice.

For lack of better words, I was blinded by the light. I didn't know what they did at the time, I think I have an idea now. It's that thing Isaac was yammering over. Well, that doesn't narrow it down. Like a floxing capacitor or something. If he wanted to, he might've spent all day talking time. Hapless for him, I've all the time in the world. Not like it's a blessing.

In a blink of an eye, I was freezing in front of a sign that read "Welcome to Whitehorse". Snow fell in every direction, and in the corner of my eye, I saw a familiar cloaked traveller. In another moment, I stood in the Clippingham visitor's centre. Yet, like before, the hasty people moving all over vanished into thin air. In their places were several switches to operate some spaceship. Then I fell. Into a pristine laboratory, a minesweeper board, P & Q's workspace, a comic strip, an apartment, a... void? It was over. Peace, at last. Well, not for long.

Horns were blaring. I was certain I set off some sort of alarm somehow, as I heard the speaker come to life. With a roaring, metallic, monotone voice, someone in the facility called for a Lewis Liddleston. That name... something so far away, yet so close to me. I wasn't able to take it, so I ran as far as my legs allowed. For a moment, I believed I recognized Stella's coat; 'twas a mere teal smear in a sea of sangria sights.

I felt my hands inching towards the malachite-shaded glass. In spite of my hatred for the practices done here, I had to admit there was a sort of charm to the stasis chambers. Still, the charm of the exterior doesn't even begin to compare to the splendor inside. Not like she'd ever repay my admiration.

And so I ignored the bottle. While my anagrammatic analog did fine with this potion's aid, I have no intent on dying from a possibly poisoned pastiche of secretive saps. No ma'am, not today! So there I was, laying on the floor, staring at the seraphim above. Okay, I probably looked like a total spoon, and there were probably people watching. I don't know what I was thinking. Confined to worm-pose, I tried to loosen the door, only to find it wasn't locked to begin with. In fact, it had no reason to be; there was merely more white void beyond. In spite of my hazy grey matter, I attempted to crawl in anyway. Eyes closed, brace for impact.

I'm sorry, let's start again. My name is Celia, I married into Argres, and I live literally nowhere. If this message happens to reach someone, I apologize greatly. This message, as it exists with a lack of alteration, is scrambled. It has to be; it probably is. I don't know how I exist, so anything I send into reality cannot be kept in its original form. Anyway, the signal's dying. Don't bother telling Sam. Send all my love to Lu—