

G.A.M. KERTOPERMONO

ELDRITCH FAIRYTALES

Eldritch Fairytales

G.A.M. Kertopermono

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Foreword

This story has originally been written with the intent of it being just a novella of less than a hundred pages, so that I could write off one of my ideas. I originally wasn't sure whether I should make it a novel or a game, but in the end, I chose the latter, as the setup worked better.

The main idea came from something I thought up earlier, when I was still working on a fan project called Project Captain N. I was discussing several spin-off ideas, including a project based on the Page Master. It included various fairy tale characters and characters from novels. Eventually I suspended work on Project Captain N to work on a game, but the idea for this story still stayed on my mind, eventually evolving.

I knew from the start I was going to include various public domain characters, and I also knew who the main characters were supposed to be. Originally I kept the option open for an RPG, so I had a cast of four characters ready, two being Edgar and Diana, who basically remained the same characters. As I changed its purpose to that of a pure novel though, I wasn't restricted by the original idea anymore, and so the main cast stayed with these two, with the other two characters being the focus in the fourth and fifth chapter respectively.

The focus also shifted from the initial threat, originally being Cthulhu from H.P. Lovecraft's The Call of Cthulhu,

to that of the relationship between Edgar and Diana, with a more generalized threat as the backdrop.

The message remained the same though, and that was the only restriction I had put myself up to, which is noticeable in the way nearly each chapter ends. I hope the message I tried to convey does come over, although I also hope that this message isn't really in-your-face, but rather a bit subtle. Whether I succeeded I leave up to you.

Regardless though, I hope you'll enjoy this story.

— Gary A.M. Kertopermono

Public domain

As this novel references public domain work heavily, it would be more than fair to make certain things available as public domain myself, and also give an explanation of why I'm wavering away my copyrights on these elements. I decided to give away certain elements because, like the main character, I feel like I should also give something back. **Do note that this section is rife of spoilers, so you should avoid them if you don't want to get spoiled.** Seeing as this is the last section of the foreword, you can skip the rest if you want.

The Fyereth have always been intended to be public domain. I originally conceived them as characters to be used for a sprite comic I'm planning to (hopefully) one day make called Gil Diamond Adventures. In that story,

the Fyereth were essentially the same, sans the dimension hopping, and with certain other changes. In essence, everything related to the Fyereth are free to be used in any form of media. This is also mainly because I hope that one day the Fyereth would be used in mainstream games, either tabletop or video games, as well as in various works of fantasy and other types of fiction.

Anything described as being written by Edgar has been written in such a generic and generalized way that they could technically not be copyrighted at all, so naturally, you are free to use any of these story elements.

The **Vampire's Tome** and its contents are free to use for anybody. I feel that, seeing as the main character has made this for one of his stories, I should give the tome the same treatment. Another reason is that the name can be considered fairly generic. Any specifics on its contents, like the workings of each spell and effect, are also free to use.

Remember that even though I made the above elements available as public domain, any expansion on the works made by others aren't automatically placed in the public domain as well. Rest assured though, if I ever expand on these elements myself, these will automatically fall under it unless otherwise stated, so that there won't be any confusion about it.

The Calm

It was a stormy summer night when she came to my store. I had already closed it down, but stayed a bit to tidy up the place before going home, when I noticed a young woman outside. She stood there, banging on the windows, wanting to get in, as if she had no other place to go. I let her in, not even questioning her or asking her what she did out there.

“What a night,” I said. “Things were never this bad.” She remained silent. She didn’t have anything to protect her from the rain, not even a raincoat. All she had was a cloak and a basket, and I assumed the cloak didn’t really help that much. Apparently she didn’t seem to mind, but I did get a towel for her.

“You know, you’re lucky,” I said, “I was about to go home.”

She remained silent. My place was just upstairs, so I wouldn’t have to go through the rain, and I didn’t really feel like sending her back out. I hesitated a bit.

“I have a guest room. It isn’t much, but at least you’d have a place to stay, at least until the storm passes.”

Still nothing. I walked towards the front door. “Well, I’m about to lock this place up, so if you still want to leave, you should do it now, otherwise you’d have to wait until tomorrow.”

She didn’t make any move towards the door. I decided to just let her stay, and locked the store. I then moved to

the back, towards the stairs, where she followed me. I then showed her to the guest room.

“If you want to take a shower, you can just take a clean towel from one of the cabinets. I’m gonna go and make some dinner, you can join me if you want, but it’s just some leftovers.”

She said nothing, instead going to the guest room, closing the door behind me. As I went to the kitchen, though, I heard her enter the bathroom where she indeed did take a shower. Since I was already done setting up the food, which only needed to be heated in the microwave anyway, I searched for some old clothes that my grandmother left behind after she passed away. My grandfather used to live here, but after she passed away and he retired, he just gave it to me, along with the store, saying the house contained too many memories of his wife. He didn’t even want any of her old stuff.

I took an old sheet of paper, wrote on it that she could borrow the dress, and then placed it, along with the dress, on the guest bed. After a while, when I had already heated the leftovers and began my meal of some old chow-mein with side vegetables and fries from another joint, she was done with her shower and had already changed.

During dinner, she didn’t say anything. It was actually pretty awkward, but I did try to break the silence, by talking about random stuff. Eventually though, I gave up, and asked her if she wanted to watch some television, to which she nodded. I gave her the remote, but either the channel I put it on was already good enough or she didn’t really care

much for television. As she was busy watching television, I looked outside to see how the weather was. All I could hope was that the weather would improve.

It didn't get any better the next day, and it seemed that it got a little worse. I wasn't sure if opening my store would do any good, but I had nothing to lose anyway. The store, and by extension, my home was located at a high part of the city. If there would have been any flood here, it wouldn't have affected me anyway. Still, the roads were quiet and almost no other shop nearby opened save for some stores, so I doubted anybody would come by. I would have been the only store still open.

After I opened the store I decided to go upstairs for a bit, to have some breakfast. I almost didn't smell the freshly made pancakes, it was only after I saw her eating at the table, wearing nothing but a towel, that I noticed the sweet scent, the kind you would expect when visiting your grandma, cinnamon filling the air, almost tasting the vanilla flavor, not just of the powdered sugar, but of the pancakes as well. It really made me miss my grandmother.

A plate was sitting there on the table, with servings just for me. She briefly glanced at me, as if she wanted to tell me to sit down and eat this breakfast. I could finally take a good look at her. She had long dark hair and blue eyes, and despite her relatively short size, I could see she was a young adult, at least no younger than eighteen.

"Did you make these pancakes?" I asked. She nodded. Even now she remained silent. At this point I wasn't even

sure if she could ever talk. "Well," I said, "if you want, you can stay, at least until the storm passes."

"It won't," she said. I honestly didn't know what to say to that. On one hand, I was surprised that she finally decided to talk. On the other hand, I was curious about what she meant, and I guess that curiosity pushed me to ask what she meant with that.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather get dressed first," she said. I nodded, and said, "I understand."

I looked outside. Despite it already being fairly late in the morning, the sky was almost as dark as the night, only the faintest of sunlight was visible, which gave the surrounding an eerie glow. Thick streams of rain was pouring from the sky, and this time, I could even hear the faint sound of thunder. The wind howled stronger than before. I wasn't even sure if it was safe to be outside, and apparently more people thought that.

She was ironing her still moist clothes. At first I wondered why she would do that, those clothes came straight out of the rain, but then I noticed that she used the bathroom sink to wash her clothes in. I was tempted to tell her she could have used the washing machine if she wanted, but decided not to.

I went to clean the shop a bit, in case any customer would enter. After a while, I could hear her come down-stairs. She had all her own clothes back on, including her red cloak.

"So," I said. "What brings you here?"

“Stuff,” she replied.

“Right,” I said. I felt like asking more about it would have been pointless. “So, I didn’t really catch your name,” I said.

“It’s because I didn’t give one,” she said.

Not wanting to give up that easily, I asked her, “Well, what’s your name then?”

“You can call me Diana,” she replied. “You’re Edgar Howard, right?”

I was kind of surprised. “How do you know my name?” I asked.

She wasn’t phased by that question though, and replied, “I saw your first name on some of your unopened letters, and I assumed this was a family business, so I took it the ‘Howard’ in the name was a last name.”

“That explains a lot,” I said. “Now, about earlier, what did you mean when you said the weather wouldn’t get any better?”

“I just assumed it by the clouds getting darker,” she replied. “Just take a look in the direction the wind is coming from. Near the horizon the clouds are getting darker and denser. This by itself wouldn’t be an indication, it might just mean that there would be heavy rainfall, but the fact that the air outside is still relatively warm says something. The storm will get worse.”

“Wow,” I said. “So I guess it means you’re staying for a while. That is, unless you have some other place to be.”

“No,” she said, “I don’t have to go anywhere.”

“Well, don’t you have a place to go home to?” I asked.

Even though she visually didn't express it, I could see sadness in her eyes.

"As far as I know I don't have a home," she said.

I knew she didn't want any, but I took pity on her. "You know what," I said. "You can stay as long as you like. But you'll have to help out in the store. I can't pay you much for it, but I hope providing you a roof and food would compensate that."

For the rest of the day, she did help out in the store, but as there wasn't going to be a lot of people coming by anyway, I let her roam around the building. It wasn't as if there was anything of value in the house, and for some reason I trusted her. In fact, she did nothing to break that trust. I could even go out to do some groceries.

After I closed up the store, I went upstairs to heat some leftovers, when I noticed that Diana had already prepared dinner. It smelled delicious, and I didn't have a real good meal in a while, so I was a bit excited.

"This is really good," I said after taking a bite. "What is it?"

"It's a stew I made using both leftovers and some vegetables you still had lying around," she said. "You should really use the products you have, these vegetables were almost expired."

"Well, this is really good," I said. "Where did you learn to make this?"

"Let's just say that you'll have to be creative if you don't have a lot of food," she replied.

“You won’t believe how happy I am having you around,” I exclaimed, only afterwards just realizing what I had said. She didn’t seem to mind though, and even though she didn’t say much or show it, but I could see she was happy to hear that.

In the following days she opened up a bit more. She didn’t really tell me anything about her past, only about the past few years living on the streets, but nothing more. I didn’t mind though, if she didn’t want to share it, it wasn’t my business.

I did notice she took interest in one of my hobbies. During my spare time, I was a writer of short stories, and she was really interested in them. As I saw it more as a hobby, I always made my stories free to use for people to expand upon, using a public domain license on them. People, both in real life as well as online, always asked me why I didn’t just sell my stories, why I would just waver my copyrights away instead of using a license like Creative Commons. I would always respond by saying that I didn’t need it. It was my way of giving the world something back, as my life wasn’t exactly that hard. My bookstore was running well, even during these stormy days. Even in the age where people can just purchase ebooks online, people apparently still wanted physical copies. I even stocked voucher cards for popular services just in case, and sure there was a huge demand for them, but they weren’t really needed. I could go by just fine with book sales alone.

Diana didn’t care about what I wrote, she just loved

reading, or at least my stuff. She told me that during her childhood before she wandered the streets she had read a lot. I could see in her eyes she didn't like that period that much, but when she talked about the stories she read, I could see her eyes sparkle. I told her that this was the reason my grandfather opened this store, and why he gave it to me when he retired, even though I was only eighteen back then.

“Why did you start writing?” Diana asked me once.

“Well, when I was young, my grandmother always told me stories when I came here to visit my grandparents.”

After a long pause, she said, “That's it?”

“Yeah, basically. I mean, I really love stories, but in the end, you can only tell a story so many times. Creating your own stories still is the best.”

The storm subsided about a week after I met her, although the weather was still gloomy. Diana had since moved to a bigger room in the building, which originally held a bunch of boxes containing stuff my grandfather used to own, as well as a lot of stuff belonging to my grandmother. Before then I never really had taken a look at them, save for that time when I was looking for a dress, but when Diana asked about them, I went through the boxes. Most of the stuff were things I couldn't find any use for myself, so I called my dad to see if he wanted them, although I doubted it, as it was all stuff even my grandfather thought was useless. There were other things Diana asked if she could keep, like old clothing belonging to my grandmother, and some other stuff like an old typewriter that I wanted

to keep myself.

Nobody seemed to mind that Diana was staying at my place. Some did ask about her, but I just told them I took her under my care. I did eventually find out that her full name was Diana Pierson, after I needed to fill in some paperwork, due to her now living in with me.

“Why did you take me in?” she asked one day.

“It’s just something I do,” I explained. “You’re not the first one I took into my home. Most of the time people coming here to stay actually ask if they could work for a few weeks before they leave again to continue their journey to wherever they need to be.”

“So you expect me to leave one day?” she asked.

“Not really,” I said. “I mean, unless you want to leave.”

Even though she didn’t smile, I could see she was happy I said that. I think it was the way her eyes sparkled a bit, as if she was given a new chance in life, I don’t know. I was always able to see certain nuances in the expressions of people, or the way they talked, it was the main reason why nobody wanted to play poker with me. It was also how I could feel if I could trust somebody. I never took someone in if I couldn’t trust that person, and fortunately I rarely had to turn somebody down because of that.

But although Diana felt happy here, I could see that she was missing something, a feeling of homesickness. At times, I could see her just sitting, staring at nothing. I didn’t ask about it, and she didn’t seem to want to talk about it. Even when I wanted to talk about small things about her past, she only talked about the past few years.

She was actively trying to avoid it, and I knew it. After a while though it passed. Even the sadness I saw in her eyes previously disappeared, and she began to feel at home.

“Do we still have *The Call of Cthulhu* in stock?” she asked from behind the counter, while I was getting my coat.

“I don’t think so,” I said.

“I’m going to get some groceries,” I said. “Do I need to get you anything?”

“No, thanks,” she said.

Two months have passed since I first met her. Even though this was a rather dark summer, the weather was still nice. It was warm outside despite the sky being cloudy constantly, and for the past few days there wasn’t any rain. There were warnings that a second storm was coming, but at least this time everybody was prepared.

Business had been going well. In times of a storm, people would always turn to non-electronic forms of entertainment, in cases the power would go out. And, because it was the end of summer, students would come for study material.

I was about to leave the grocery store, when the owner, mrs. Zimmer, stopped me to ask me about Diana.

“She’s a nice girl,” she said. “Doesn’t smile much. Come to think of it, I’ve never seen her smile.”

“Yeah,” I responded, “she doesn’t really do that.”

She smiled. “Now that’s a shame. Her smile would most likely be delightful. I was wondering, though, did you ever ask her out?”

I laughed. "No, mrs. Zimmer, no I haven't."

She acted surprised, although I knew she was just being playful. "Well you should. You two would make a lovely couple."

"I'll think about it," I said, laughing a bit.

The Flame

The second storm hit a few days later. It wasn't as strong as the last one, nor did it last as long. It was around this storm that Diana acted a bit strange. On the first day of the storm she kept staring outside. On the second day, she was nowhere to be found inside. I went outside to look for her, when one of my neighbors spotted her on the roof. I had to talk her into going inside. She didn't speak until the storm passed.

"I'm worried," I said to her. "Why did you get up on the roof?"

She looked down. "It's just... It felt as if it could bring me home."

It didn't make me less worried. "What do you mean? Why would you think that?"

"It's... It's nothing." She closed her eyes, as if she wanted to cry.

"Hey," I said, "it's okay. I'm not mad at you."

I held her hands. She then looked at me, into my eyes. "I can't go home," she said. "I know what you're thinking, but I just can't. There's no way I can get there, it just doesn't exist anymore."

I smiled to her, and said, "Then why don't you try and find a new place to call home?"

"That's sweet of you," she said, "but it doesn't change what I feel. I haven't seen home in over fifteen years. I've

left everything behind, all my belongings, my family. And the worst part is, I'm not even sure if it was all real. I'm not..."

She stopped and looked away while a single teardrop rolled from her eye. She then continued. "There's a lot you don't know about me. I'm not even sure if you would trust me once you know who I am."

"Then try me," I said, but I knew she wasn't ready for it yet. As she walked back to her room, I said, "Just tell me when you're ready."

"Mind if I come in?" I said, after knocking on her door.

"Sure," she said. I entered her room. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I just wanted to ask if you wanted to go out shopping," I said. "I mean, you could use some new clothes. The ones you're wearing right now are a bit on the tiny side."

I wasn't kidding. It seemed as if the clothes she wore were made for children, and I was only talking about the size. It was a miracle she still fit in it.

The mall was only a few blocks away. It wasn't a big one, but it had a few clothing stores and a tailor. I tried to persuade her to go to the various clothing stores, but all she wanted is go to the tailor.

"What can I do for you?" the tailor said.

"Do you make anything?" Diana asked.

The tailor smiled. "Of course. This place may seem chic, but I actually do all sorts of requests for a reasonable price."

"Well, can you make this in my size?" Diana said, while

pointing at her current clothes.

“Of course I can,” the tailor said, “but would you mind if I change it up a bit? To give it a more mature and elegant look.”

The tailor took her to a drawing board and started making a sketch while explaining what he would like to do and receiving suggestions from Diana.

“Could you really do that?” Diana asked.

“Most certainly,” the tailor said.

“And how much would it cost?” I asked.

The tailor didn’t think long. “Don’t worry about the price. When it’s done you can always decide if you want to pay for it or not.”

We were told that the dress would be done in three to four days. We said goodbye and left. When we returned for the dress, the tailor showed us the dress. It was probably the first time I saw Diana smile. I paid for the dress, which was reasonably priced, and went home.

She never got rid of her old clothes though, and she always had her cloak with her. She said that it reminded her who she was, as it was the only thing she had left from her youth. She also seemed happier since then. Suddenly I realized that making her happy made me happy.

It took me about a week before I dared to ask her out. I was hesitant, because this could have changed everything, but I just had to try it. Fortunately for me, she was okay with it. We decided to just go to the cinema, to keep it a bit casual.

“That movie sucked,” she said after we walked out of the theatre, putting emphasis on the word “suck”.

“Surely there are some good parts in it?” I said jokingly.

“Yeah,” she said. “The end credits.”

We both laughed.

“You know, she said, “I’ve never been to the cinemas before.”

“Do you like it?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she said. “It’s nothing like reading a book or anything. I mean, a film is all visual and stuff, but with a book you can always use your own imagination.”

We arrived at the store.

“So you’ve never actually dated before?” I asked to her.

She shook her head. “No, never. I have been alone for a very long time.”

“Well,” I said, “normally this would be the point where the guy drops the girl off and goes home, but since we’re technically live in the same house, that’s going to be hard.”

“How about you bring me to my room instead?” she said. And so I did.

Once we were at her door, she asked, “Is this also customary?” She then gave me a kiss.

I stuttered a bit. “It isn’t common, but yeah, sometimes.”

“Well,” she said before closing the door. “See you tomorrow.”

For a time, it stayed with that one date. Small things did change, though. She smiled more, at least when I was around, and she often talked about how her day was when

we had dinner. She also started to read some of the new books we received in the store. She was happy, or at least, she seemed happy.

After a while though, I decided it was time to ask her on a second date. I was still nervous, especially since we hadn't talked about our first one, even if it was just a casual one. This time, I wanted to take her to a local restaurant. I was happy she didn't decline, and seemed fairly excited.

I knocked on her door. "I'm coming," I heard from the other side. I didn't expect what I saw when she opened the door.

"Do you like it?" she asked, referring to her new dress. "I bought it from the tailor. Said it fit me perfectly."

I was still speechless, and, noticing this, she smiled.

We had a fun time, and the food was good too. Afterwards, we decided to go on a stroll. It was a little chilly, so I wrapped my coat around her. It was the first night in a long time when the stars were visible.

We arrived at what was the highest point of the city, a lookout point. From here we had an excellent view on the entire city. Lights from the houses below shone like little candles, almost star-like, and even further down we could see the lights from the cars entering and leaving. The full moon hovered just slightly above the horizon, and even though there were all kinds of lights around us, we could still see some stars.

"It's beautiful," she said.

"I know," I replied. "Where I was born, we didn't have this view, although I do have to admit, the stars were much

more beautiful there.”

She looked at me. “Do you think I am beautiful?” she asked.

“Of course,” I answered.

That was the first time we locked lips, and the day we became a couple.

The Deep

“Honey, are you alright?” she said, still a bit sleepy.

I was having another nightmare. It was the same one I had since I was a child. I was walking around the store, when I suddenly found the basement door, which was normally always locked, opened. As foolish as I was, I descended. There were no lights there, I couldn’t find a lightswitch. As I descended though, I heard something, initially it sounded like an animal growling, but then it became more unearthly. I was too afraid to go on, but I couldn’t stop myself from continuing. As I reached the final step, due to the dim light that the entrance emitted, I saw something coming at me. At that point I always woke up.

“It’s nothing,” I said. “Just another bad dream.”

“Tell me about it in the morning,” she mumbled, before falling asleep again.

I didn’t want to talk about it. It made me remember the dream. And it always made me wonder, why did I keep having this dream? I had been reading a lot of stories, seen a lot of television series and movies, and most of the time when a protagonist had a recurring dream, it was a prophetic dream. I decided not to think about it anymore, I had work to do the next day.

I closed my eyes. I couldn’t get my mind off that dream. I could see something coming from the shadows, but what? I did remember it being chained or tied up to something.

Also, it didn't appear to be human, yet had a distinct human shape. Only, it didn't really look human, especially his head. It sort of looked like...

I woke up again, letting out a short scream.

"Okay, that's it," I heard Diana say. She turned on the light. "What did you dream about?"

Still a bit shaken, I said, "I think I saw a wolf."

"So you went downstairs and saw some wolf?" she said.
"Did this wolf say anything?"

"No," I replied. "It sounded like unintelligible noises, kind of like a growl, but not really. It wasn't from this world at least."

"And what exactly did it look like?" she asked.

"Why do you want to know that?" I asked.

"I just want to know," she said. "You know, in case there's a meaning to it all."

"Well," I said, "it stood on two legs, but hunched. Its body was human-like. I didn't really notice any sharp claws, only unusually large fingers. And I'm not sure, but it seemed like the creature didn't have any hair. In fact, it might not even have a skin."

"What did you just say?" she exclaimed, with a surprised look.

"It seemed as if his veins were exposed." I said.

With that she walked to the kitchen, got a flashlight, and stormed downstairs. I quickly followed.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She tried to open the basement door. "Where are the

keys?"

"Well," I said, "they don't exist. Or at least I don't have them."

She then backed away from the door. "It's no big deal." She then proceeded to kick the door in.

Quietly she went downstairs, with me following. She began shining the light across the room, which was empty. There was absolutely nothing.

"There definitely has been something here," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She kept shining the light. "Did the room look exactly like this one?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"When was the first time you had this dream?" she asked.

I thought a little, then replied, "I think about eighteen years ago, when I was about six years old."

"And you never ever entered the room?" she finally asked. She didn't wait for answers, though. "I shouldn't have had kicked in the room. Get back upstairs, try to find anything to keep this door closed."

I headed upstairs, after which she followed and quickly held the door shut. As I was searching, I asked, "Is it really needed to hold this door shut?"

She answered, "It's just a precaution."

We held the door shut with nails. It wouldn't really keep it shut from the other side, but at least it kept the door from opening by itself. "It's only to keep the light from shining in," she said. Meanwhile, I kept thinking. How did

I remember the room? Had I...

“Yes,” I said. “I had been there before. What happened there I don’t remember, but I do know that something I’ve seen there traumatized me a lot.”

I paused a bit. “Now it’s your turn. What’s your deal with this?”

At first, I wanted an answer, but then I saw her, her hands holding her head, while she rocked back and forth. I could hear her mumble the same thing. “Too soon.”

I’ve decided to not talk about it anymore, not for a long time, but I knew she one day would tell me. I however didn’t expect to find out the truth so soon. Only a few days later we’ve got a visit from two government officials, who came for Diana, deciding to take her away. She didn’t even struggle.

“Where are you taking her?” I asked.

“I assume you’re Edgar C. Howard?” one asked. I nodded, at which point they took me with them too.

The journey took a day, but eventually we arrived at a big complex. Here we were briefly separated. Diana was taken to a mirror room, and I was taken to the observation room.

One of the officials turned to me. “Mr. Howard, I’m sure you’ve got a lot of questions, so I hope this will clear some things up.”

I could see a female official enter Diana’s room, sitting across her.

“Hello,” the official said. “Before we begin, I want you

to tell me who you are.”

Diana looked down. “Diana,” she said. “Diana Pierson.”

“You know that’s not the name we want,” the official said. “I want you to tell me your name.”

“I told you,” Diana said. “I’m Diana Pierson.” I could hear in her voice she became a bit angry.

“I want you to answer me correctly,” the official said, now in a more menacing tone. “What is your real name?”

Diana then stood up and yelled. “I don’t have a name, okay? I wasn’t written that way.”

“Now, calm down,” the official said. “Relax. No big deal.” She took out an envelope, containing a few photographs. “Now, I want you to tell me who these are.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know them.”

The official looked a bit annoyed. “Look. Three years ago, when we found you, there was a two day storm. A few months back, another storm hit, during which we find him,” she shoved one photograph towards her, “and the next month, during another storm, we found her. Are you telling me you don’t know these people?”

The official then stood up, and began talking in a more threatening tone. “Where do you come from? Why are you here?”

The official next to me then took out a microphone. “That’s enough.” He then turned to me. “It’s your turn to talk to her.”

I was taken to the room where they held Diana. When I entered the room, she came rushing to me and I held her in my arms.

“I’m sorry I got you into this,” she said, almost in a tearful way. I didn’t know what to say, what to do.

“Diana,” I said. “I have to ask you something. I want you to tell me the truth, even if it all sounds absurd.”

“You wouldn’t understand,” she said.

I took her to her chair, sat down in the chair opposite of her, and took a deep breath. “Remember the other night, when we went down into the basement, when you asked me if I’ve been there before? Well, I called my grandfather up to tell me if he remembered me going to the basement. He said that I did, and that he heard me screaming, talking about some monster I might have seen. He also told me that initially he didn’t believe me, since there was nothing down there, but while I was hospitalized, my grandfather and some other people took a good look at the room, and they probably saw what you have seen, scratch marks on the floor, as if a pair of claws were trying to hold on to something, dragging along until it reached the wall. I’ve seen the look on your face, and I can tell you know what that was, don’t you?”

She nodded, but remained silent. I held her hand, saying, “It’s okay, you don’t have to tell me now. I’m not in a hurry. I mean, they might be, but I will be here, until you’re ready to speak, even if it means we’ll be stuck here for a while.”

And so we were. For the next days, we were placed in a separate room, constantly being monitored. I can’t say that it was a pleasant experience, but they did treat us well. We

got a decent sized bed, and we got to eat what we wanted, since technically they couldn't count us as prisoners. They even offered us various forms of entertainment, most likely so we wouldn't be suing them later on.

During this time, Diana decided to open up a little bit more. We talked about life, about what she always believed, and for the first time, she talked about family, or at least about her grandmother.

“My granny was always lonely, but for some reason it never seemed to bother her. I remember her has a happy person. In fact, that’s the only thing I seem to remember of my life prior to...”

She stopped. I never asked further, but this time, curiosity got the best of me. “Prior to what?”

She seemed relieved when I said that. “Prior to the story.”

She paused, looked at me to see if there was any hint of surprise. I wasn’t. Nothing surprised me anymore.

“You see, I’m... Let’s say we assume there are an infinite number of worlds, worlds created by the choices we made, none directly influencing each other. But let’s say there are also an equal amount of worlds that are directly influenced by this one world, by what we think, what we believe. All our knowledge, spread over multiple worlds. Every fantasy we had, all our hopes and dreams, all stories we wrote or even just briefly thought of, all of that manifested into many worlds. These worlds don’t have a history like this world does, everything prior to what is known doesn’t exist.”

I began piecing things together. “You arrived in a storm, about three years ago. I think I remember that storm. Eighteen years ago, I believe there was another storm? I don’t know. I believe it was around the same times I started having nightmares, around the same time I actually went down the basement. Your cooking, you only remembering your grandmother and acting strange when I mentioned I saw a wolf. The fact that you always had your red cloak with you.”

“Now you understand who I am,” she said.

At that point the door opened. “You two are free to go. We’ve got all we know.”

I wasn’t done, though. I needed more answers, but most of all, I wasn’t confident that they were competent enough to handle others like Diana.

“Wait,” I said. “Let me see the other two you’ve found.”

I heard a different voice. “We can’t just let you do that.” A middle-aged man entered the room. “The name’s Jacob Williams, but you can call me Jacob. Please sit down.”

We decided to sit on the bed, while he took a chair. “Now you’re wondering who I am, and what we are, and why you’re here. Rest assured, we’re not some shady group, or some government secret. We work for the government to intercept any potential threat, be it national or international threats. We work close with every other branch, heck, this is how this fine lady got her current identity. The reason you don’t know about us is because we technically don’t have a name, so we go by whatever branch needs us. However, we don’t have a specific branch

for extraterrestrial or extradimensional threats, which is why we are tasked with doing that.

“Now, on the question of why you two are here, it’s simple. For the past two months we’ve been tracking her down in order to find out what the heck is happening, and we were hoping she would have some answers. Now, there’s a reason why we took you along with her, but it became clear to me that you two would figure that one out together. You’re important to her, and you are also the only way to get her to talk, which is why I’m sending you home for now.”

I was a bit annoyed. “You’re sending us home? Just like that?”

“Yeah,” he replied. “Now, I’ll leave you two alone to gather your stuff. The cameras are off, so you won’t be monitored anymore. Just tell us when you’re ready.”

“I don’t get it,” I said to Diana as we prepared to go home. “Why would they need to bring me along?”

Diana said nothing, but her actions told me anything. She took a knife and walked towards one of the walls, where she started to scrape off the wallpaper, revealing a wall full of writings. The only thing it read was my name, written over and over again.

“What the hell?” I yelled. “What is that? Why is my name there?”

“I’ve written it,” she said. “I’ve written it so I wouldn’t forget.”

My head began spinning around. “You knew my name.

How did you know my name?"

"It's a long story," she replied.

"I've got plenty of time," I said.

She ignored me, instead she continued to pack. I held her shoulder. "I was tal-"

"Don't try to argue with a person holding a knife," she said, as she held her knife against my throat.

We both didn't say a word on our way home. I didn't know what to believe, who to believe. But most of all, I didn't want to lose her. Finally, as night fell, we arrived at our destination. We were home.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have-"

"No," I said, "I'm sorry. I'm sure you had your reasons. I mean, I probably wouldn't have believed you if you said you were... Anyway, let's just get inside. We can discuss this later. For now, let's just get home. We wouldn't want to keep the guys waiting with our luggage."

We looked at the various people holding our rather heavy bags. She laughed. "Yeah," she said. "Let's go home."

We didn't get the chance to enjoy our return. As I turned on the light, I heard a noise in our bed.

"Jesus! Mom, dad, what the hell?"

"We didn't expect you home," I heard mom say, still a bit sleepy.

I wasn't amused. "Oh, god, I sleep in that bed!"

Diana entered the room. "I see your parents were having a good time."

"Don't say it like that," I said, rather annoyed at this

situation.

“Hey,” my dad said. “We were already done before you showed up.”

“What are you even doing here anyway?” I asked, almost feeling like I wanted to throw up in the process.

As my parents were getting dressed, my mom said, “We heard you weren’t home, so your dad and I decided to just take care of the place until you got back.”

After this awkward moment, I explained the entire situation. They remained silent the entire time, and with each word their expressions became more serious. Eventually, after we were done explaining, my mom broke the silence.

“So,” my mom said, “you’re not really called Diana Pierson?”

“That’s the name I chose,” Diane said.

My dad shook his head. “This is really hard take. Do you expect us to believe all this?”

“To be honest, dad,” I said, “no, no I wouldn’t.”

It remained silent for a while. Suddenly my mom spoke up. “Are you two sleeping together?”

“Mom!” I exclaimed. “You don’t ask that!”

“He’s right,” dad said.

It did brighten the mood though, and for the rest of the night, we didn’t talk about it.

“Now you two, stay strong,” my mom said as my parents headed back home a few days later. “Oh, and son, please do forgive your father, he thinks he’s level-headed, but deep inside he really does want to believe.”

“I will,” I replied. “Take good care, and say hi to grandpa for me.”

We headed back inside, back to our normal lives, but we both knew things could never be the same again.

But somehow, we didn’t want things to be the same again. We both knew who we were, what we were up against. The only thing we did need to discuss was how she got my name, or rather, why she had my name.

“I guess there’s no way around this,” Diana said. “I’ll have to tell you. The reason I have your name is because I’ve read your stories before, and I think you could help.”

“Help who?”

“Help the world.”

“But how?”

She took a deep breath. “When I was five, I was bringing granny cookies. You know the story, I met the wolf, he directed me to the longer path so that I could pick flowers for her, and once I got there, I was supposed to meet the wolf disguised as granny. Except that last part didn’t happen.

“I can’t tell you what exactly did happen, but I knew something went wrong even before I entered granny’s house. As I opened the door, I could hear something speak, something begging for help. I was afraid, but I had to see if granny was okay.”

She stopped. At first, a single tear began to flow, but as she continued, more started. “I entered her room, and there she was. Dead. She was scared, and then she died. There was blood everywhere.”

I held her, comforted her, until she was ready to continue. “When I looked around I finally noticed the wolf, chained to the bed, covered in what looked like blood vessels. He was the one begging for help. I didn’t help though, I got scared. I turned around and ran. That’s when I fell. Not to the ground though, through some hole in the ground.

“I can’t remember how long I fell, but what I’ve seen, it’s indescribable. Everything around me seemed alive, yet wasn’t. It was like I was floating in outer space, yet I wasn’t. Eventually I passed out, and when I woke up, I found myself in what I call the biggest library ever.”

She stopped. I knew she didn’t want to continue, but I already had figured it out by then. “When you say ‘the biggest library ever’, do you mean the collective knowledge of everybody and everything in the world?”

She nodded. “At first, it seemed like a large collection of books. There were books everywhere. All these books kept me busy for quite some time, until I read about technology. After that, this place began to transform, adapting to what my mind could handle, and from that point on, I began seeing computers. At first, there were these simple computers, nothing like I’ve seen in this world, due to my own vision of what a computer was supposed to look like, but then they became more and more complex, until the complexity reached my personal limits.

“After that I used these computers to take in all that I could learn. It even kept track of how long I was there, or at least, how long I perceived myself to be there, which was

approximately twelve or thirteen years. There was nothing for me to do but to wait until there was a way out.”

“Wait,” I said. “Couldn’t you have just tried to look for it?”

“I did,” she replied, “but despite the fact that it had every information categorized and indexed, and despite it being very accurate about the information I wanted to get, there was no way for me to get out. You’ll have to understand, nobody has thought of a way to get out of such a place, not even in fiction. Not to mention I had nothing to work with, everything around me technically didn’t exist.”

I understood what she said. In most cosmic horror stories, certain entities that willingly show themselves try to adapt to what the individual can handle, so that his mind would not be shattered. I assumed the same thing happened with where she was, an eldritch location adapting to the senses of what the individual could handle, which also meant nothing was actually there. I didn’t even want to think about how all that information could manifest itself into one location. We had about two hundred thousand years of human knowledge of billions of individuals, spanning years per individual. If one were to record all knowledge of one individual during its lifespan, even the biggest library couldn’t contain it. It would take at least one data center to store all the information.

“So, how did you find out about me?” I asked.

“By accident,” she said. “I was looking for information about other worlds when I stumbled upon your stories. Even at the age of fifteen you were active in writing, and

even though they weren't as good as they are now, there was great potential."

She stared for a while, and then said, "I was trapped in that library, but I could still see what happened around me, in other worlds. At times, small rifts would open up in the library, too small to fall through, and even if they were bigger, there was a sort of bubble around it that prevented anything from entering. I guess it was just pure luck that I got there.

"But in the short times the rifts would open, I could see entire worlds be consumed. It... I could see each world from the outside, as if the world was inside a bubble, except its contents shifted around. It's hard to explain. I could see each world, but I could only see glimpses of it. It's like a clip show, or a montage sequence in a movie. You only see bits and pieces, but they still tell a story.

"However, every time these rifts opened, I could see certain worlds be consumed or invaded, I don't know which of the two it was, all I know was that something that I perceived as black smoke enveloped the worlds before the rifts closed again. Not all of them, but a lot.

"I started observing each world, tried to get key elements of the stories going on, and that's how I figured out these were all worlds from works of fiction. Specifically, the ones that were safe were either relatively new stories or works still protected by copyright. The worlds that were consumed fell under public domain."

"Wait, how does that work?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," she said, "but it might have to do with

how reproducible a world is. You see, my story, the Little Red Riding Hood, has been retold a numerous amount of times. I especially liked the version where I killed a wolf using a tommy gun.” She laughed. “But what I think happens is, when a story is being retold a number of times, when it’s remembered so long even through time, its barriers get broken down. Copyrighted material can’t be easily referenced in other material without the proper rights. Public domain material doesn’t have this restriction.”

“Which means that these worlds can be easily invaded,” I said, “but also be left.” I realized where she was going.

“I mean, it doesn’t mean copyrighted works don’t get their own world, in fact they do. People often say that stories sometimes can come alive. In a way, it’s true, it’s just that every story actually comes alive. Every fantasy, every idea, every concept, every version, they all create their own worlds, even for a brief time. However, once a world is created, it continues to move on, become a world of its own. When a story ends, or when you stop reading or writing a story, it will move on, evolve, possibly even diverge from how it actually continues. It also means that these worlds are influenceable eventually. The link to other worlds might not be as strong though. I however can’t explain why it is that the link to copyrighted material is the weakest, but it might be because being able to be cross-referenced helps in weakening the barriers. This is why I’ve only seen public domain work be invaded.

“I found you after searching for public domain work, to perhaps find a way, a spell or something, to get me out

of the library, when I stumbled upon your work. You were one of the only people I could find who just easily wavered away his copyrights. I realized that a lot of worlds were suffering, and that one like you could help these worlds out.”

At first, I didn’t realize what she was trying to say, but then I noticed. “Wait, what do you mean?” I asked her.

“When I said the rifts closed whenever worlds got consumed, I meant to say the rifts closed most of the time. I’ve seen the damage done to several worlds, them being corrupted, or forcefully merged. I’ve seen some being destroyed, and broken fragments bonding with other worlds. I thought that maybe they could use somebody like you, someone who could create worlds that were free to enter.”

“And you still think that?”

“No, I don’t. What I do think is that we need someone who has the knowledge though to resolve any loose threads. A writer like you.”

I thought for a second. What could she mean by that? After some thinking, I came to a conclusion. “You need someone to finish existing stories,” I said. She nodded. “You need someone who has extensive knowledge of these stories”—she nodded again—“and find a way to reach the ending of that story in its altered state.”

“Exactly,” she said.

I sighed. “You know, it’s not that easy. Each of these stories had a fixed beginning and a fixed end. When something is altered in that story, the end can’t be reached, it has taken a different course. A changed story always has a

different resolution.”

“It’s not just that, though,” she said. “Every world I’ve seen that reached its end became closed off, they became impenetrable no matter if they were public domain or not. I’ve seen it happen a few times, a world would almost be devoured when suddenly the process would stop. That’s why you’re needed. A corrupted world can still be devoured if it hasn’t been shred to bits.”

“Why me though?” I asked.

“Because you managed to give me my happy ending,” she said.