

September 16th: Commemoration

Photo by Elijah O'Donnell



"Wrap it up, Laurie."

Simon gave a few firm knocks on the door as he headed across the hall to check the bedroom.

"I'm almost done," came Laurie's muffled voice.

"You *know* you have eight minutes."

"What about the battery?"

Simon stopped, the disconnected plug of their bedside lamp in his hand. He sighed and stepped back into the hallway, opening the door to Laurie's room. Sure enough, she was sat fixedly staring at her screen, where a house under construction was flitting by from various angles as she was designing it.

"I already turned the battery off. We're not having this argument again."

"It's stupid."

"You may think so."

She had not looked away from her game so far, but now she wheeled around in her chair with force. "Dad, it's humiliating. A *week*? We're not in the Stone Age anymore. We *have* electricity. Then why would we pretend like we don't?"

He had heard it all before. They'd had the argument over and over, this year *and* the last, ever since she'd grown old enough to

form an articulate opinion and connected enough to have it shaped by others. She was saying what many were saying. That the Blackout was nonsense. That society should rejoice in the restoration of old technologies, albeit hardened to withstand a similar disaster, rather than wallow in nostalgia. Everyone was entitled to their opinion, he supposed. He had only hoped that in this house, in his own family-- Ah well.

"Finish your house. I don't want you to lose it." He closed the door.

Downstairs, the television was tuned into the one public channel still broadcasting, showing a speech by the Prime Minister. He only listened with half an ear. It was essentially the same speech. In memory of those who died in the initial waves when the sun burned too bright, of the strength and resolve of people in the face of unfathomable natural catastrophe, a celebration of the ingenuity that led to recovery (their PM knew how to pander). The jagged columns and arches of the Shadow Memorial formed the backdrop. Simon had meant to go and locate their youngest and make sure she wouldn't be frightened, but he lingered a moment, taken - again - by the pitch darkness of the sky, how the Memorial seemed to dissolve into it as it rose. The sight sparked something. The ghosts of memories forgotten by a child's mind.

Elexa, their youngest, located herself, bursting into the living room.

"Has it started yet?"

“Of course not,” said an annoyed voice from the hallway. Laurie had joined them. “The TV’s still on isn’t it?”

“Oh good,” said the ten year old gleefully. She grabbed her sister’s hand, not seeing or not caring for her mood. “Come on.” She tugged her to the stairwell.

Laurie was forced to follow. Simon trailed behind as well as they ascended.

“Where are we going?” said Laurie.

“To see the lights.”

“There *are* no lights, Lex. That’s the whole point.”

“Yeah! Exactly.”

They went onto the roof balcony of their mostly underground house. Downtown was dark, only the beacons of emergency services betraying its location. The suburbs, however, were still lit, lines of light stretching everywhere. One by one, they went, first individuals who preempted the deadline, then whole rows at a time as power was cut.

Ellexa pointed them out. “Poof. Poof. Now that one. Aww, I thought they would be next.”

Just before their house was cut off as one of the last in the city, Simon got the last glimpse of her face. Beaming.

July 15th: Perfect



Photo by Mauro on Unsplash

“Just like in the picture,” the barista said as he put the cup down. I gave him a big smile. “Thank you. I appreciate the effort.”

Sure enough, there it was. The perfect brown. Exactly as advertised on the poster outside. While I waited for it to cool, I watched the people on the street. A woman pushing a black stroller as a little girl in a bright red parka skipped along to keep up. A pair of businessmen with slicked back hair and suit jackets, one a grayish blue, the other a dark black that did him no favours.

I was pulled from my observations by the scraping of the seat next to me. A young man had sat down, wearing a boring sky-blue jacket and a confident smile, with a light tan that in the middle of winter I could only imagine came from a recent skiing trip.

“Why is a lady like you sitting all by herself?” he said. I returned the smile, envying his tan while I thought about an answer.

“It’s nice to sit and enjoy the view,”

“I was quite enjoying the view from over there.” He gestured to a chair farther in.

“Oh you did? The view’s much better from here. Look,” I led his gaze to a woman crossing the street. “Her hat is fascinating.” The vibrant blue roses popped from the washed-out white background. The tuft of fiery hair escaping from underneath was a nice bonus.

“Are you a fashion designer?”

“Oh. Well, something like that. I collect colours. What do you do?”

“Consultancy.”

“What do people consult you on?”

“All kinds of things. Nothing a fashionista like you would be interested in. Why, is there something I can offer a consult on?” His teeth were an off-white yellowish colour that I didn’t love when he smiled flirtatiously at me.

“Actually maybe. I’ve been feeling kind of pale lately.” I ran my hand over my cheek and looked for a moment at the skin of my hand. “Do I look pale to you?”

“You look great.”

“Yeah but it would probably be better with a tan right?” My coffee had cooled. I folded my hands around it. The warmth spread into my hands.

His smile faltered a bit. “Sure.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“When you’re done with that, let me buy you another.”

I now realised that he hadn't brought his own drink, and now I felt bad.

"Oh no. Just the one should do me fine. Actually, you can have mine." I pushed my cup towards him.
"It looks a bit bland now, but I'm sure it'll taste just fine."

He tilted his head as he looked at the grayish liquid inside, still steaming a little. I was studying my hand, twirling my fingers to test their new look in the light.

"That's much better, don't you think?"

"Hmm?" He had leaned closer to study the cup but now looked up, confused.

I slid out of my seat. "I should go now. Thank you for keeping me company. Don't let your coffee get cold. I promise, it still tastes the same."

"But how ..."

I had already walked to the exit, holding my arm out into the sunlight as the door fell shut behind me.

July 1st: The End at Four

"You sort of start thinking anything's possible if you've got enough nerve" - JK Rowling

Yesterday I broke the world.

Yesterday by my reckoning, which is all I can grasp onto to keep from getting lost in what was once reality.

It started, I suppose, when I was born, 16 years ago by my reckoning, fourth daughter to a forgettable house in the greatest empire that ever was or would be. As I took my first breath, Panira, the fourth and holiest of moons, crested the horizon to shine on my home. Fourth and most studied by astronomers throughout, for it was known:

"When the fourth does rise to four and four, and by question asked a truce is torn, so will end the world."

It was the wisdom of the brightest minds that this was the great celestial alignment, the phase of the moon that would disrupt all their arcs and shatter the sky. In hindsight, they really ought to have known better.

But that was then. My magic revealed itself at an early age and I was sent to a college. Not even a good one. The Masters and Mistresses were bad, but in fairness I was a worse student. They tried to teach me the ways. I would not follow them. They lectured me on theory. I couldn't remember half of it. Yet when I grew frustrated, or my curiosity was tickled, my feats were extraordinary. I produced things none of them had thought possible from a disinterested child, sometimes things not possible at all. So they sent me up the ladder, to grandmasters and stuffy scholars, to be studied, to learn my rules.

Eventually, I stood before the greatest of them. The true Lords and Masters of the Arcane, who deeply understood every crevice of the laws that governed magic. If it was possible, they had done it. If it was possible, they would twist it to their advantage. For if a way was known and they failed to use it, the others would surely destroy them. I know this now. I did not yesterday.

Yesterday I stood before them, and saw the question in their eyes: "Why?" And after 16 years, I was done answering it. I wanted to go home.

So I did.

It was some surprise to my family when I suddenly stood in our humble country manor after years. I did not leap or teleport or anything that the Lords thought possible. I had imagined it could be this way. So home I was.

I daresay it was more surprising still when not long after the Arcane Council arrived through their own means, washing over my home like a tsunami might a sandcastle, demanding to know how I had slipped their grasp. Why was I able to break the laws?

I was now thoroughly fed up with it all, and besides I had realised something. Never had a master taught me magic I didn't imagine was possible anyway. Why would it stop there? So I asked them in return: Why not?

Then I imagined them to not exist. And for one glorious moment, they didn't.

That was a mistake. Even I could not fathom the consequences of such powerful beings simply not-being. I had sent them beyond my reality, but not beyond being. And that was fine, until one of them got the idea to try it my way, and imagined themselves back. And the others followed. In that moment I thought that would be the end of me, but they had bigger concerns: each other.

They've now done battle for thousands of years, most of those many times over. By my reckoning, it has been a day. Give or take.

I imagine it's time for a rebirth.