

# A Hand from the Shadows

*a Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell Fanfic*

by **Rodo**

THERE ARE MANY arrivals and departures that do little to kindle the imagination of the fashionable lords and ladies residing in London. Those of Lady Pole were not among them. To say London society had been surprized by her reappearance after years of exile in the barren moors of Yorkshire would be an understatement. When she brusquely told those that visited the Poles at their residence in no. 9 Harley-street that she had been trapped in a fairy kingdom and that the experience had forever destroyed her appetite for fashionable gatherings and soirées, the news spread like wildfire. It inspired fantastical tales of rapes and, in one memorable instance, an audience with the Devil. Some said she'd been rescued by her dashing husband, others by the vanished and tragically cursed Mr. Strange. When she told Lady Marlborough that she had been saved mostly by Mr Norrell's man of business, a black servant and a magician turned madhouse keeper, the Lady promptly ignored all Lady Pole had said and insisted that she had been saved through an elaborate plot of none other than the Raven King himself.

It took an entire four days for Lady Pole to grow heartily sick of London on the whole and its residents in particular. She missed her dear friends: Stephen, who had vanished following Sir Walter's abysmal behaviour in Starecross Hall, and Arabella, who, after thoroughly studying the letter Mr Strange had sent, she had deduced must be in Venice. Where else could he have arranged for someone to wait for her when he had no friends left to him in England?

And so Lady Pole shocked London society for the second time in one week by vanishing as suddenly as she had appeared. She took with her only two travel trunks and her stubborn mother and new lady's maid for company. Sir Walter, by

all accounts, was left on his own on a foggy Monday morning, looking somewhat like a wet cat. A footman called Jimmy, who worked at no. 8 Harley-street, later told this to his sweetheart Annie, who worked for Lord Liverpool, who promptly told all the other ministers and people of importance he could find. They all took great delight in Sir Walter's fall following the disrupting return of magic to England and the disappearance of its troublesome magicians, conveniently forgetting that just a year or two before, most of them had been desperate for Mr Norrell's approval or at least a seat next to him at a dinner party. Now, of course, they would tell all those who didn't listen that they had always known Norrell to be an odious bore that should never have gained such a prominent position, unless they were busy condemning the mad and murderous Mr Strange. The only one immune to such gossip was the Duke of Wellington, yet nobody dared criticize him for it.

As tongues started to wag on the Strand and in the Houses of Parliament, Lady Pole boarded a ship bound for Venice, to the continued protests of her mother. Mrs Wintertowne had been both delighted and appalled to see her daughter again. She'd believed her lost to madness or some other unspecified disease Sir Walter kept private to preserve her reputation, so to see her daughter in good health and of sound mind was a great boon to her. Once she'd been told the story of Mr Norrell bargaining her away to a depraved fairy, however, she had scraped together all the dislike she had felt for magicians over the years and condensed them into the purest vitriol she aimed at Mr Norrell at every opportunity. Her daughter did not stop her, quite the contrary, the two of them bonded again over their mutual hatred of the man. Yet Mrs Wintertowne quite plainly did not understand her daughter's desire to visit Venice to look for the wife of a magician, of all people.

"We could just send a letter," she argued as a burly sailor carried their luggage on board. "Or Sir Walter could send someone. I'm sure he knows someone who will be able to tell you all about Venice. Or if we wait a few weeks, he could travel with us. We could also take a proper amount of luggage with us, my dear. We haven't even packed any dresses that are appropriate for an evening in sophisticated company."

Lady Pole levelled a glare at her mother that eloquently conveyed all that she was too well bred to voice out loud. Sir Walter had sworn to stand by her in sickness and in health but made himself remarkably scarce during the former; she would

never attend a ball again so there was no point in packing dresses for one; she would not send a letter and wait patiently for a reply when it was her dearest friend in the entire world whose well-being was at stake. Had Lady Pole reflected on the glare that caused her mother to cease complaining until the ship left port, she would have recognised it as one she had learned at Lost-hope, where the gentleman had used it to silence his court. Since she did not, she was left to enjoy the feeling of being free and full of purpose for the first time in her life.



“You reached her, I trust?” Gilbert Norrell asked his former protégé as he returned to what was once the library of Hurtfew Abbey. It was much as it had been before – the stones were the same, as were the shelves and little tables, but the room lacked something that was essential to libraries the world over: books. It was also lacking a roof, but so far, the weather in whatever plane of existence the house had travelled to had been kind to the two magicians.

Jonathan Strange nodded with a slight smile that only served to emphasize how sad and tired he was. The fairy’s curse had taken its toll on him, but even more so had the strain of trying to save Arabella before his time ran out. Now that he had achieved his goal, he wished for nothing more than to lie in her arms and sleep for a century. “Have you figured out where we are?” he asked, because that question had kept the two of them busy for the past hours or days – it was hard to tell, and maybe not even applicable to wherever they were.

Norrell sighed and scratched his head, just below the ruffled old wig that he wore only because he had forgot that it was still on his head. Strange had to smirk when he saw it but there was enough mischief left in him that he suppressed a remark about it.

“On the outskirts of Faerie, as far as I can tell,” he said, “but my knowledge of the realms beyond England is patchy at best. No magician ever compiled a thorough accounting of them, not even Ormskirk<sup>1</sup>.”

“And the curse?” Strange asked. Both he and Norrell still felt it at the back of their heads, but it could not follow them here, wherever they were.

Norrell shook his head. “It was evidently not linked to the fairy’s life, else it would have broken when Sir Walter’s servant killed him.”

“Did he?” Strange wondered. “We saw the realm collapse, but maybe it was the

fairy who survived and not Stephen Black.”

“A fairy’s realm is linked to him in ways we cannot comprehend,” Norrell argued. “That it was collapsing should mean that he was dying, I recall several accounts of a severe change in a fairy realm when it changed rulers.” His little eyes darted around the room reflexively, searching for the books that held the answers he was looking for. When he saw the empty spaces and ripped pages, he hunched his shoulders and seemed to shrink. Who was Gilbert Norrell without his books? “But as we have no way of confirming that, there is a change the fiend still lives.” “But if Lost-hope is still there, only not as it was before, with a new ruler ...” Strange mused, “isn’t there a chance that the curse was not anchored to the fairy but his realm? He did cast it while I was there, not in Venice.”

Norrell mulled over this question, turning it back and forth in his mind until he was satisfied that he had seen all its sides. Strange had started to fidget by the time he was finished. “Possible,” he admitted, “but unlikely. I have heard of spells linked to locations. There was one famous incident involving Lanchester<sup>2</sup>, but all those explicitly make use of English magic linked to the stones and waters itself. Faerie is a far more insubstantial place.”

“And fairy magic is different from English magic. We have no idea what it could and couldn’t do. For all we know, it could be far easier to link magic to a place here, and maybe that’s the source of all fairy magic as we know it.”

Norrell sat himself down on a half-destroyed chair missing its back in the slow, deliberate manner of a man far older than him. After a moment’s hesitation, Strange took a seat on the chair opposite him and for a long while – or maybe no time at all – both men stared into the emptiness and darkness beyond the broken windows of Hurtfew Abbey.

“If only I had my books ...” Norrell muttered to himself. They had been his friends when he was lonely, his children whom he cherished, his treasures. They had been his world more than anything in England could ever hope to be, and now they were lost. Without them he was a ship unmoored, a sailor without a guiding star, a man without purpose. In short, he was more of a magician than he had been in the decades before, but would never think to consider himself such.

“With all due respect, Mr Norrell,” Strange objected, “I don’t think there was anything in any of your books that could help us now. We will have to make do without them.”



Unlike her departure from London, Lady Pole's arrival in Venice was ignored by all those present in the city. A lady ostensibly fleeing from her husband came not even close to the likes of Jonathan Strange and Lord Byron. The handful of English travellers and expatriates in the city didn't bother with two ladies staying in one of the quieter hotels near the Piazza San Marco and who didn't attend any of the soirées that attracted the infamous poet still haunting the city. Really, the only ones who gave more than a passing glance at Lady Pole were the Greysteels, whom she sought out two days after her arrival. Gossip from the English gentleman running the hotel provided her with their name when she inquired after whomever was known to associate with the English magician during his stay in the city.

"Pardon me, Lady Pole, but I do not know why you requested a visit," Dr Greysteel told her when she swept into the room, followed by her flustered mother.

"I am looking for a friend," she told him frankly. "Arabella Strange. I believe her to be in Venice, with you."

Dr Greysteel sighed and shuddered slightly, then asked her to follow him. They went up the stairs and into a drawing room lit by the warm rays of the Italian sun. In it sat two women, doing needlework and chatting amiably until they caught sight of Lady Pole.

"Emma!" Arabella Strange cried, jumping up from her seat to run towards her friend and hug her enthusiastically. The two women laughed and cried to the point where the onlookers – with the exception of an equally moved Flora Greysteel – found themselves embarrassed to be in the same room. Englishwomen, while not expected to be as reserved as Englishmen, were nevertheless supposed to keep these outbursts private, Mr Greysteel and Mrs Wintertowne silently agreed. It was the beginning of their friendship and they soon retired to another, smaller sitting room to chat about Venice, the challenges of raising difficult daughters (never mind that Emma Wintertowne had been the opposite of difficult until her ordeal) and the loneliness of widowhood.

Lady Pole meanwhile finally let go of Mrs Strange with a last, fierce hug and Arabella introduced her to an entirely unembarrassed Flora Greysteel. It was her penchant for dramatic company that had compelled her to follow Lord Byron to

Italy, after all. She enjoyed romances and deep friendships immensely.

“Miss Flora Greysteel, Lady Emma Pole. I’ve told you about her already. Miss Flora helped my husband when he was in Venice and agreed to wait for me here. Jonathan tells me that she is the only one who would believe him that I was not dead,” Arabella explained.

“You spoke to him?” Lady Pole exclaimed in surprise. “All of London can speak of little else than the disappearance of him and Norrell.” She spat out the name with the usual distaste. She had not been privy or interested in the other talk of the town – herself.

Arabella sighed and took up her embroidery again. Flora looked at her inquisitively before remarking, “You didn’t tell me about that. When did you see him?”

Arabella sighed again and affected the air of a woman suffering from being parted from her beloved. The two others could see her spirits – so high after her reunion with Lady Pole – wane again. Lady Pole cursed the fairy silently yet again for making her dear friend suffer so.

“It was when we visited the place he stayed,” Arabella explained. “There was this little pool and his face appeared in the reflection. He told me that he was fine, but didn’t know if – *when* – he would come back. He tried to make light of it, of course, but he didn’t sound very optimistic.”

“It is all that Mr Norrell’s fault!” Emma complained. “Everything would have been fine had he not contrived to involve that accursed fairy!”

A calming but sad smile appeared on Arabella’s face. “It would not be, for the two of us would never have met had he not, and for that at least I will always be thankful,” she admitted. “And Jonathan would have never found his true calling. Before we got married, I was so worried about him not having an occupation and, by and large, I am glad he found something to be passionately interested in, despite all the trouble it caused. It was as if he was missing a piece to become whole before.”

“And I am sure Mr Norrell meant no harm and was horrified when he heard what had happened to you and Bell,” Flora added. Lady Pole’s face darkened instantly and she prepared a lengthy tirade to launch at the oblivious Flora, but then she felt a hand on her own and saw her friend looking at her.

“Let us not fight,” Arabella said. “Not now that we are finally together again. Instead, let us speak of the future, of Venice and of what Flora can shew us here.

She and her father have been in the city for almost a year now, and she knows all the most beautiful places, the tiny churches, the art collections and the Lido. She has shewn me around some already and I'm sure she'll be happy to do the same for you."

After a moment's hesitation, Lady Pole swallowed her anger and tried to calm herself. Arabella was right. She would not give the magician and the fairy the satisfaction of ruining her newly reclaimed life with constant anger. The anger could be reserved for special occasions only.

"But please," she told her new friend. "Do not shew me once great beauty ruined by decay. I have seen enough of that in Lost-hope to last me a lifetime and some of the older buildings we passed on a barge when we arrived reminded me of that. And you must tell me what brought you to Venice."

It was Flora's turn to sigh and remember her own, if more superficial, brush with doomed love. She told her story only hesitantly and left out some of the more embarrassing elements, as we are all wont to when retelling our own follies. Lady Pole hmm'ed and ah'ed in all the right places while Arabella stitched with a content smile for the first time in weeks.



*My dear Henry,*

*I hope you are well despite the tragedy that has befallen our family of late. While it must shock you much to receive a letter from me, I think it better to prepare you this way rather than shew up on your doorstep unannounced. As this letter likely tells you, I am alive, and due to my supposed death, I was quite unaware of how dire the situation in England is until my friend Lady Pole arrived in Venice with news of home.*

*Jonathan never hurt me, and what happened to me was not his fault in the least, so you must not blame him. I was abducted by a lord of Faerie, who erased my memories and kept me prisoner in his court. I do not know what possessed you to think me dead, as Lady Pole does not know the specifics of it. She was caught in the same fairy's clutches at the time and nobody bothered to tell her. Jonathan did his utmost to free me, causing great harm to himself in the process and I pray to God that he will find his way back to me one day.*



*Would you please begin the process of declaring me not dead? You know more about it than I do, I'm sure. I would also hope that you will fight the pernicious rumours about my husband. He did not murder me and I am certain there are reasonable explanations for all other charges laid against him.*

*I think I will stay here in Venice for a while longer to recuperate, since I have made some new friends and the sea air of the Mediterranean seems to do me good after all the months entrapped in a brugh. I'll be sure to write you more of my exploits with Miss Greysteel and Lady Pole and buy you a souvenir before coming back.*

*With love,*

*your sister, Arabella Strange*



John Childermass had expected many a headach when he had called the meeting of the re-formed York Society of Magicians with Vinculus. Magicians on the whole were a quarrelsome bunch, and the magicians of York had not disappointed in that respect. They had separated into two factions, one supporting Norrell, one Strange, before he had even arrived. Childermass had expected that Vinculus would be a handful and he was not surprized that getting the man to sit still enough to have the letters on his skin recorded was a lot of work. What he had not expected was that most of them now looked to him for guidance on the direction of English magic. Not when they had men like Honeyfoot and Segundus to look to, who were both well-bred erudite gentleman already established as magicians. But they were firmly on the side of the Strangites and Childermass had been the only magician who had refused to take a side at all, seeing the advantages and disadvantages of both positions. Norrell had always been too timid and Strange not careful enough. Was it really so difficult to find a middle ground?

When the gaggle of magicians became too much, he buried himself in the pages transcribed from Vinculus's skin. They were all recorded now and Childermass checked him daily for changes. A publisher was even working on reproductions of the pages to spread to men more knowledgeable in the art of deciphering strange symbols. Segundus in particular had recommended the work of a man

called Thomas Young who had distinguished himself with an article on Egyptian hieroglyphs and who dabbled a little in the field of magic as well. Staring at the unknown symbols, Childermass wished him the best of luck. There were eighty-three symbols on the pages they currently had access to and so far, he had only been able to put the pages in a tentative sequence.

“You still not getting anywhere?” Vinculus asked when he walked by the desk, looking for his shoes.

Childermass shrugged.

“Well, have fun staring at my pages. I’m going to get myself a drink.”

Childermass let him go. He’d known that Vinculus was the kind of man who needed to get drunk often if not regularly, else he’d turn uncooperative and sour, something Childermass did not appreciate in a man he shared his lodgings with. He simply continued to stare at the pages, trying to find a pattern that stood out to him. He sighed and went back to the tentative sketch Vinculus had made of the symbols his skin had shown before. It would be easier to decipher the symbols if they already knew what they said, but Vinculus was not too sure of his work. How the man could not recall what his skin had looked like for most of his life was a mystery to Childermass, but telling him so did not change the facts.

A knock on the door woke him from his daydreams. The candles were almost burned to stumps and it was pitch dark outside his window. In front of the door stood Segundus, a letter in his hand.

“Do you know how late it is?” Childermass grumbled.

“Do you?” Segundus retorted before unceremoniously entering Childermass’s little apartment. “I’ve finally received a reply from Young.”

“And what did he have to say?”

“He says there should be no problem in deciphering the King’s Letters since we already know which language he’s using and that he’s willing to give it a try should we fail to produce any results.” Segundus took a seat in one of the old dining room chairs.

“I’m happy to give it a try, but Young assumes too much. I’ve looked at Vinculus’s notes and I think the book might not be in English, or only partly. At least a significant part is written in a fairy language. The Raven King grew up among fairies, after all,” Childermass said and noticed a small stack of letters that had been deposited on a footstool by the door. He took them and settled back into his chair by the desk. Then he handed Segundus the notes, effectively

distracting him from anything he might wish to share while Childermass inspected his correspondence.

There were a number of letters from theoretical magicians all over England inquiring after the whereabouts of Mr Norrell. Childermass had answered letters like these dozens of times already. He'd pass those off to Honeyfoot, who had much more patience and grander words than Childermass ever would. Another was from Lord Portishead, the only remaining, if former, publisher of *The Friends of English Magic*. Lascelles had not yet reappeared from wherever he had vanished to and Childermass hoped he never would. Portishead had sided with Strange against Norrell and now found himself in the unenviable position of having to continue a publication whose goals he no longer shared, but whose circulation was extremely profitable, thus disinclining one to step down altogether. It seemed Portishead had heard of Childermass's refusal to pick sides and thus asked him to become co-editor of the periodical. Childermass snorted at the thought. He'd not written anything longer than a shopping list all his life and never felt the need to edit even the worst esoteric treatises from Norrell's library. It suddenly occurred to him that out of all the magicians remaining in England, he was the most educated due to his years serving Norrell and secretly reading his books. Wasn't that an absurd thought? A former pick-pocket, one of the most educated man in his field. Still, this might interest Segundus, so he handed the letter to him.

It was the last letter that Childermass stumbled over, not just because it was one that he couldn't pawn off to someone else. It was written on fine paper if nondescript at first. Only when he opened it, did he realise the full scope of it. He blinked at the words, stupefied.

"What is it?" Segundus asked.

Childermass sighed. "I am being ordered to London, where I am to serve as His Majesty's Advisor in Magical Matters to the government. They expect me within a fortnight."

Segundus smiled at him with a distinct lack of surprize on his face, telling Childermass exactly who he had to thank for his predicament. He answered with a half-hearted glare that failed to impress a magician who had faced a fairy lord and almost died.

"You are the best choice," Segundus replied placidly.

"Which is what you told their lordships when they went to you, I presume?"

Segundus shrugged. "I was the only other half-practical magician Sir Walter, and

by extension, the ministers in London, knew. But I have never read a single book of magic and have performed only some small feats since its return. You outdo me in both respects.”

“You sell yourself too short and me too highly,” Childermass snorted. If the ministers expected another Norrell or Strange, they would be severely disappointed. Childermass lacked the studied knowledge of the first and the practical genius of the latter and had never aspired to either. With any luck, they would take one look at his gruff manner and unkempt hair and rethink their position once they’d met him.

“I am also working on a book,” Segundus admitted. “I don’t have the time.”

“And I do?”

Segundus didn’t answer and went back to staring at Vinculus’s notes. Childermass instead busied himself by making a mental list of all he would have to take with him to London. Vinculus would have to come as well. Childermass didn’t trust him to check himself properly in the mirror each morning without him there to keep the man in line. At least he should be pleased enough to get back to his old haunts.



They had decided to leave what was left of Hurtfew Abbey behind. Norrell did so only reluctantly, looking around the library as if his books might reappear at any moment, but the longer they stayed, the more changes the house underwent. Corridors led to places they hadn’t led to before, wooden panels on the wall disappeared to make way for stone, and a tree appeared in what was once the dining room. The servants’ quarters had disappeared entirely. Hurtfew Abbey was slowly transforming into a part of fairy and within a week or a year or a century, only a place called Few-hurts would be left.

Strange, far more well versed in life on the road, had found them four large leather bags and stuffed them with all the food that hadn’t either rotted away or sprouted into tiny apple and pear trees that stood somehow outside the Abbey and inside the larder at once. Time passed differently in this place, they had noted, a well known phenomenon in Faerie. And while Jonathan Strange was mostly worrying about never seeing his wife again, calling up visions of her in pools and puddles whenever he had the time, Norrell had found himself an empty

notebook in which he took down even the most minute observations.

“I have come to the conclusion that clocks and watches are of no help whatsoever in determining the distortion of time,” he announced as he eyed the stormy sky sceptically and secured his coat and bags more tightly on his person. “I can never tell whether or not I have looked at one for five minutes or fifteen, even if I’ve been counting the seconds. Do you think it will rain? It doesn’t look like a good time to leave.”

Strange raised an eyebrow and smiled a little at his former master. “It has looked like that since we arrived, and it looked like this when I was on the King’s Roads the last time. I don’t think the sky has much to do with the weather in this place. And if all else fails, you have your coat. I’ve had to cope with much worse in the peninsula and Belgium.”

“Most curious,” Norrell muttered, then did the first step. They had determined that they needed to concentrate on where they wanted to go in order to reach their destination, based on Strange’s walk through the mirrors to Deptford and the stories Norrell knew. There was only one problem: they knew not if Lost-hope was still Lost-hope. And names, as they had both learned recently, were important for magic. Still, staying was not an option and neither was a return to England, so Lost-hope was the only place they could go.

The road was long and winding, leading them over bridges and under hills, past windswept moors and withered heaths that resembled their counterparts in England only in so much as that they would both look the same were they painted by one of the masters. There were still so many shoes, left by centuries of wanderers. How many were left by people abducted by fairies, who had escaped their masters only to be forever lost on the roads, Strange wondered to himself. He would like to look at Arabella again, happy in Venice with Flora, but that would have to wait until they reached their destination.

They were both tired beyond belief when finally a familiar outline of towers and trees lined the road they walked on, but they found the place more changed than they had anticipated. It looked the same in the way an old ruin that was rebuilt and refurbished looked the same before and after, which is to say not at all, yet it was somehow still recognisable. The trees were no longer bare, the rotten wood of shipwrecks long past had been buried under moss and fresh grass and the broken weapons were slowly rusting away. Soon, there would be nothing left of them.

Inviting lights twinkled from the arched windows. When they reached the entrance, they were greeted by a porter who frowned at them before opening his mouth in a wide smile full of bees. Strange and Norrell exchanged a glance full of doubt before entering the mansion.

The interior of Lost-hope had changed as much as the exterior. The tree at the centre of its hall was sporting tentative blooms and leaves no longer littered the dance floor. Pairs of fairies were still swaying on the floor, but others kept the candles lit and worked as pages, offering refreshments to the revellers. It was an altogether different atmosphere than that of the Lost-hope of old, one reminiscent of the bright balls of London, not the opulent events fairies preferred. And above it all, on a throne at the far end of the hall, sat the man who had once been Stephen Black, on his head a silver circlet, in one hand a sceptre and an imperial orb in the other.

“The nameless slave shall be a king in a strange land,” Norrell murmured and Strange eyed him quizzically in just the moment when the new master of Lost-hope beckoned them to approach him with a nod of his head. Both magicians felt humbled by the aura of majesty surrounding the former servant that compared not at all to the madness their own king was shrouded in.

“I welcome you to Found-hope, magicians of England,” the king said solemnly. “What brings you to my realm?”

Norrell and Strange were struck speechless for a moment that stretched uncomfortably before them in a way that neither was used to. Both were well versed in speaking to ministers and other distinguished personages of London, but neither had truly spoken to a monarch in his prime before.

“We’ve come to seek shelter, your majesty,” Strange finally told the man who’d been caught up in their plots and plans against his will. Were he Norrell he might feel guilty for it, but since he was not, he only saw a man who’d been a victim of the same fiend that had tormented his beloved Arabella. “The former master of this realm cursed us and we cannot return to England. We’d hoped to find a way to break the curse in the place it was cast.”

The king of Found-hope looked first at Jonathan Strange and then at Gilbert Norrell as if he could see all their faults and weaknesses, which he could, yet none of his thoughts could be discerned from his neutral mien. Finally, the king nodded in assent.

“You may stay while you search for your answers, provided you do not disturb

my subjects. I can see that there is a magic about you that draws you to this place, but whether or not it is the curse I cannot yet tell. However, this will have to wait until after tonight's ball. You may dance or retire to one of the side rooms for refreshments until then," the king said, dismissing them.

The two magicians took the latter option, where a beautiful and ageless fairy in a midnight dress offered them some sweet summer wine and childhood dream cakes. Mr Norrell, uncharacteristically, didn't hesitate in the least and picked up a sky-blue cake to nibble on before the servant floated away to serve a couple of single women giggling at them from a corner behind their fans.

"It is a common misconception that eating anything in Faerie will condemn you to remain here forever. There are no documented cases of it ever happening and many that disprove it. After all, the Raven King and Thomas of Dundale both lived in Faerie for years and aged in that time as well. One can only assume that they must have eaten something in all those years. Now, what do you think happened to the body of the former master, my friend? Maybe it holds the answers to our questions."



It had been a foggy morning when the Arabella Strange, Flora Greysteel and Lady Pole set out for a walk along the quayside, but while they walked past the gently bobbing gondolas and busy Italians, the fog had made room for the last warm rays of autumn sun, turning the day into a pleasant one for a walk. More gentlemen and their wives and daughters crept from their hiding places indoors when they noticed the change, just as the three ladies, none of whom were too bothered by the unpleasantness of fog, being English, sat down in a café at the Piazza San Marco to rest their feet. They had been in the city for weeks (in Lady Pole's case) or over a year (in Flora's), and by this late October day in 1818, they had seen all that Venice had to offer them. This did not mean that they no longer enjoyed the rich houses rising from the sea or the Byzantine aspect of the Mediterranean architecture, of course; they merely were no longer awed by the sight. They found it was just as easy to enjoy the view and the smell of brine on the wind while sitting in a café, drinking the strong Italian coffee and nipping on *amaretti*. Lady Pole in particular was still not too fond of being on her feet for extended periods of time.



“What a fine day,” Flora remarked, watching young couples walk by with only a distant hint of melancholy in her eyes. “I wish you could enjoy it more, Bell.”

The woman in question simply sighed and looked at the hands folded in her lap while Lady Pole eyed her sharply and nodded in agreement with Flora. “You’ve been melancholy lately. It’s not like you, my dear.”

“It is nothing, I assure you,” Arabella said. “I simply miss Jonathan.”

Flora and Lady Pole exchanged a glance that shewed their worry for their friend, but neither had any experience consoling a woman who was, for all intents and purposes, a widow. Flora had never been married and was glad for it after her folly with Lord Byron, while Lady Pole rarely ever thought about her husband when he was not in the room.

“I’m sure he is fine,” Flora finally said.

Arabella nodded, yet it was obvious the words didn’t console her in the least. Of course she preferred to think of her husband being happy, exploring whatever world he was in with the only man who understood his love of magic, but this didn’t stop her from missing him whenever she thought of telling him something about her day. She found herself wanting to go find him in his disorganised study and lecture him about getting ink onto his shirtsleeves. She wanted to hear him complain about Norrell while they sat together in the evenings. She really did her best to live as he’d asked her too, but it was not as easy to tell her heart to follow her head in this.

“I hate to say this, Bell,” Lady Pole remarked with a dark look in her eyes which she directed at the Campanile and the doves and pigeons scrambling for food at its base, “you know how much I hate magic and all the evil it’s brought into my life, but I am also heartily sick of waiting for an outside force or noble hero to vanquish my problems and I know you must feel the same. I think you should return to England, and I think you should look for Mr Segundus and Mr Honeyfoot and all the magicians still left and ask them what you can do to get back your husband. God knows they won’t do anything unless you make them.”

Both Arabella and Flora turned to their friend, who was by far the most independent woman either of them knew. It was an outlandish idea, they both thought, and yet ...

“I think Emma is right,” Flora agreed. “I will come with you as well. Your husband spoke much to me of magic and I confess I find myself intrigued by it. It is not as if I am ever likely to find a husband in my ... situation, so I won’t ruin



my chances any more than I already have by involving myself with such an unconventional matter.”

Arabella hesitated a little to come to a decision. She had never considered taking up magic herself and doubted she had any talent for it, even if she found her husband’s friends to teach her, but confronted with the prospect of living like this forever, missing Jonathan and pining for him, relying on God to deliver him to her, she found that Lady Pole’s suggestion was more appealing than she’d have thought just weeks ago.

“You are right,” she told her friends. “At the very least, I can campaign to have the charges raised against him dismissed, if all else fails. It will do me good to occupy myself with something worthwhile. This idleness is poisoning me, it seems.”

Lady Pole smiled at her friend, one of her rare genuine ones that was tinged with neither tiredness or sadness. “I hope you will forgive me for staying here a little while longer,” she said. “I am not ready to face Sir Walter yet.”

Dr Greysteel was happy to return to England at first, missing the temperate climes and familiar food, but his enthusiasm was significantly dimmed by his daughter’s plans to become a magician, yet nothing he said could convince her to change her mind. In the end, he gave up, having always been a little too soft on his only child. At least it wasn’t a mad magician or an infamous poet that interested her this time, he told himself.



London was much as Childermass had left it. It was a dirty and busy city that paid him and Vinculus not the least mind when they arrived by coach. It rained and they were both drenched when they arrived at a boarding house. Childermass let a suite from a clerk who eyed them as if they were there to steal his silver. In Vinculus’s case, he might have been right. Of course, the former petty magician didn’t stay long, only deposited his bag in their rooms before turning to leave.

“And where are you going?” Childermass asked him while he inspected his clothes. The breeches needed to be washed before he could appear in Parliament and the coat needed to dry, but at least the shirt was still serviceable.

“To visit my wife. Don’t worry, I’ll be back tomorrow so you can check me.”

“Which wife?” The man had too many by half.

“None of your business,” Vinculus shot back before disappearing.

Childermass shrugged and went back to his task. He sent a letter to Lord Liverpool’s residence to inform him of his arrival and suggested a meeting in two days’ time. It wasn’t even time for supper when the reply arrived, ordering him to appear at Westminster the next morning at ten. Childermass frowned at the paper and wondered what had the ministers so concerned they couldn’t wait a day to speak to him.

Nothing much, he found out the next morning. They were meeting in a smaller chamber used for closed meetings and the assembled ministers eyed him curiously as if they had never met him before, yet Childermass had seen plenty of the venerable men in their powdered wigs when he was still Norrell’s servant and they’d come to the house in Hanover-square to ask him for this or that favour. They, of course, had never seen him, and consequently made up their minds to find him distasteful now that they had to.

“You simply must do something about this uncontrolled spread of magic!” one of the men – Lord Westmorland – complained. “If this continues soon ever scullery maid and mud lark will have ambitions of becoming a magician. God only knows what kind of chaos this will cause. Why, only last week a barmaid in Deptford cursed a customer to void his bowels after he had insulted her.”

In fact, it had been the bad food he had eaten before going to the pub which had caused the man to become indisposed, but Lord Westmorland cared nothing about the particular details where magic was involved. The drunken lout had accused the woman of bewitching him and that was all the truth he needed.

“And what do you expect me to do about it?” Childermass asked them.

The ministers eyed each other sceptically before turning back to him. Only the Duke of Wellington rolled his eyes at the back of the crowd.

“I think they’d prefer you to remove magic from England,” he said, “but they’ll settle for containing its spread. Didn’t Norrell teach you anything useful?”

Childermass raised an eyebrow. “Mr Norrell taught me nothing but a few minor spells. What I know I learned from watching him and Strange do magic and reading some of his books. And I think you’ll find that now that magic has returned to England, no magician can banish it again. It would take a man like the Raven King to achieve this, and I doubt he’d be much interested in doing so. No, I’m afraid you’ll have to get used to having it around.”

The ministers on the whole were determined not to do so and started to discuss

whether it was a possibility to outlaw the practice altogether. Childermass didn't tell them that it might be in the south, but the north of England was still governed by the Raven King and his laws applied before any other. Even in the south, there were still laws regulating the use of magic, yet no king had ever dared to make it illegal completely. They all liked to use it for their own purposes too much and so would the ministers when the next crisis came around, but they would have to figure that out for themselves. Childermass felt little inclined to point it out.

They finally allowed him to leave after arguing with each other for hours and predictably coming to no conclusion. They'd simply asked him to remain in London for the time being while they decided what they would do about magic. They would do nothing, of course, but that has never before or since stopt a gaggle of politicians from debating something for months.



Found-hope presented quite an extraordinary opportunity of study, Gilbert Norrell found. It was a much more cheery and welcoming place to a foreign scholar than its preceding incarnation had been. He had been provided with ink and parchment and quite exquisite quills to take down his notes of all that he saw and that the fairies told him. They were quite polite and he found that they were as interested in the stories of an English magician as they were in him. He had many invigorating discussions with them that might reframe the history of English magic should he ever publish them.<sup>3</sup> If only he could share all this with Strange.

Strange stood out immensely in Found-hope, mostly because he was the only one who had lost his hope instead of finding it. Even the fairy servants of the nameless king were baffled by his melancholy in the face of such cheeriness and prosperity as their kingdom displayed. But his hopes were the only ones that could not be restored by a place that lacked that which he most longed to behold. Instead, the ballroom, which still looked like it had before, despite not looking the same in the least, simply reminded him of his last meeting with his beloved Arabella and his inability to find any way to break the curse, even though he was in the place that it was cast, with its caster's remains. All this only served to depress him further. Arabella was his light, his hope, and Found-hope only

reminded him of the hole in his heart. And so he huddled around the ballroom and the salon and his rooms like a harbinger of misery. Needless to say, the servants preferred to pretend he wasn't there unless he called on one of them to help them. Even then, they only deigned to obey because their king had taught them better than to ignore a guest.

"Why won't you come to the salon with me, my friend?" Norrell asked him one day, although it was impossible to tell how many had passed since they arrived, if any had at all. It still rankled a magician so focussed on accurate and precise information that Faerie eschewed all attempts to impose the principles of modern science on it.

Strange sighed and stared at the tree that grew atop the corpse of their foe. "You do not understand what it's like," he said. "She is as much a part of me as magic is. Without her, I can only rouse myself to feel half as invested in my studies as I did before. She was all I ever wanted, you know? Before, that is. And if she'd have been happy with me lacking an occupation, I would never have taken up magic at all. I did it all for her."

Norrell doubted that. Magic was a force of its own and it was a mystery to him how anything could even attempt to rival it in a magicians mind. After years with Strange he knew better than to question his love for Arabella in his presence, however, and so he said: "But this conversation with the Lady Love-of-a-fickle-man and her cousin Mithridates might prove interesting. They tell me they were part of King Auberon's court once."<sup>4</sup>

Strange attempted a smile and failed miserably at producing one. "I will stay here and try to think of something regarding our predicament, if you don't mind," he explained, brooking no argument.

Norrell, never having been the least talented or interested in acquiring the skills necessary to navigate complex social interactions, did what he always did when confronted with one: he retreated into the comforting embrace of the study of magic. The Lady Love-of-a-fickle-man and her cousin were only too delighted to oblige.

"We haven't had any English magicians around for, oh, centuries," Mithridates explained. "Their opinions are always so refreshingly odd. So it is very much our pleasure to host you, my dear Mr Norrell. Tell us, do they still put men in women's roles in the theatre?"

Mr Norrell frowned. "No, I don't think so," he answered, although he couldn't

be completely certain of it. The last play he had seen was a Punch and Judy performance at age eleven, when his uncle had dragged him to the market to “have fun”, only to abandon him in favour of a tavern wench and her wares. Young Norrell had decided then and there never to pay any attention to what others considered fun again. He lived by that maxim until his last day.

“What a pity,” he replied solemnly. “It was such a quaint idea.”

His companion nodded. “Englishmen are always good for interesting ideas,” she said. “It was quite the scandal back when” – and in this moment, she pronounced a queer combination of vowels and consonants that, while technically able to be reproduced by a human being, would never occur to any – “decided to conquer an English kingdom. We didn’t know what bit him. Why anyone would want to rule there was a mystery to us.”

“Of course now we know how to value your kind as more than slaves,” Mithridates added, under the impression that they might offend their guest with their view of his realm, which was still slightly backwards and dull in their eyes, being adjusted to the overwhelming presence of magic as they were. The people of England seemed as small and undistinguished to them as their land. “Why, only recently, End-of-all-Hope gained a new ruler as well and he is half-human. Of course, he gained it in the fairy custom, so it must not bother him too much.”<sup>5</sup>

Mr Norrell blinked, and filed that bit of information away, to be dissected later, when he was free to examine the implications of half-fairies existing in present times. For now, he had a more pressing concern: “That name you mentioned ...” he trailed off, looking at his audience expectantly. “Could you repeat it again?”

The Lady Love-of-a-fickle-man obliged him, but the accumulation of sounds made no more sense to Norrell than it had before. She had to repeat it five more times, very slowly, while he tried to write down the sounds as accurately as he could on a little scrap of paper he kept in his coat for just such an occasion. When he was done, he put it into his waistcoat for safe-keeping.

“This is the Raven King’s name, I assume?”

Both nodded, somewhat bemusedly. To them, the king’s name was as common as that of George or Harry to an Englishman. That someone was so confounded by it was just so very English.

“Would you mind telling me what it means?” Norrell asked, with his heart jumping in his chest.

“Of course not,” the Lady replied graciously. “It means Boy-with-a-head-full-of-hair-like-raven-feathers. Lord Auberon was old-fashioned when it came to names, as was my own father, although his tastes were more fanciful.”

“Thank you very much for this information, my lady, Sir,” Norrell said, and he couldn’t wait to tell Strange of this momentous discovery. The Raven King’s name had been a mystery for so long, he had not thought that it would ever be possible to recover it, yet all it took was talking with two fairies. But then, Mithridates distracted him with a question about English magicians and their use of books, so that when next he met Strange, he had forgot all about it.



“What do you mean, I can’t stay in my own home?” Arabella Strange asked the guard posted in front of her own front door. The young man blushed and looked somewhat embarrassed by being confronted by two young ladies and an older gentleman who hung back, but he’d received his orders from the government and he wore his bright red uniform that proclaimed him above the concerns of mortal men and under a strict military hierarchy that did not allow for commanders in flowery dresses.

“I’m sorry, ma’am, only, nobody is allowed to enter the magician’s house by order of Parliament.”

“But this is my house! My husband’s house! This is preposterous!” Arabella argued, but the soldier stayed stubborn, and so they had to call another cab to take them to a hotel, while Arabella fumed about this truly unfair treatment of her. She asked the clerk at the hotel for a writ attesting to the money paid to the hotel that she fully intended to be reimbursed for. She called on the honourable gentlemen of parliament the following day. They were as stubbornly unhelpful as their lackey had been the day before.

“Well,” one of them asked her, eyeing her suspiciously. “How can you be Arabella Strange when she died a year ago?”

“But I didn’t die! I wrote to my brother to clear up this terrible misunderstanding. Didn’t he do anything?”

The men exchanged some nervous glances. “I’m afraid we cannot consider the testimony of a man that is clearly suffering from intense grief,” another added with a note of false regret in his voice.

They had been only too happy to confiscate the magicians' worldly possessions and putting them under lock and key, fearing that others might seize them to wreak more havoc with magic. This had obviously done nothing to contain the spread of English magic, since the houses at Hanover-square and Soho-square as well as Ashfair were profoundly unexceptional.

"Then how do you propose I prove who I am, if you do not even believe my own brother would know my hand when he sees it?"

This question created something of a dilemma, for the gentlemen couldn't very well admit that they would rather the lady would not turn out to be a dead woman. The legal process of declaring someone not dead was cumbersome at best, but it didn't concern them. The change in the reputation of her husband – who could no longer stand accused of murder if the victim was hale and hearty – did.

"Why don't we ask the other magician?" one of them suggested. Another nodded and they sent for him while they offered Arabella a seat and a cup of Assam tea. They would not be impolite to an imposter so long as they were at least reasonably good-looking.

It took nearly two hours until a familiar man in a threadbare black coat entered the chamber where the gentlemen had stashed themselves and their guest. None of them bothered to get up, and their new guest didn't seem to mind. He surveyed them with an expressionless mien that he had perfected in the years he'd been a servant.

"You called for me," John Childermass reminded them.

"Ah, yes," one of them said. "We've called you because you were the only one we could think of who'd been familiar with the late Mrs Strange. We've an imposter that pretends to be her to gain access to Mr Strange's property."

All of this was said within ten feet of Mrs Strange, who was beginning to blush with fury, while Childermass's emotionless eyes flickered over to her as if she was barely there. "Well, since this is Mrs Strange, I see no reason to deny her. Wouldn't it be against the law to confiscate private property without a good reason?"

The man he was speaking to looked quite aghast when he said this and turned to his compatriots for support. For a moment, they all looked as if they didn't see him, then one finally interjected very quietly, as if to prevent Mrs Strange from hearing it. "Are you sure this isn't some ... magical disguise used for some infernal

purpose?”

Childermass took a good, long look at the gentleman in question, before looking over Mrs Strange again, who was beginning to feel like an exhibit in a zoo. “Mr Strange himself was quite sure that the woman he buried was not the real Mrs Strange, as was Lady Pole. I think it more likely that this woman is indeed Mrs Strange rather than some creature masquerading as her.”

“But ...” the gentleman trailed off, trying to find a reason that would allow them to avoid any more problems.

“Did my brother not write to you to explain that there was a semi-petrified log of wood in my grave, instead of myself?” Arabella added sharply, and the man could only nod in distress.

Not one to recognise when he was beaten, another asked: “But where were you all these months, if you are indeed the real Mrs Strange?”

“Faerie,” she answered simply. “Then Venice. I don’t see what my absence from England has to do with anything, good sir, or do you propose that Lord Byron is dead as well since he has not set foot on English soil in years?”

After another few weak arguments were brought forth, the gentlemen were indeed forced to accept that the woman in front of them was indeed Mrs Strange. While one of them drafted a letter to the guard posted in front of her house on Soho-square, another reluctantly prepared one for the magistrate in Shropshire regarding her other property and a third reimbursed her for the trouble of having to find a hotel due to their incompetence. Then followed profuse and insincere apologies and Mrs Strange and Childermass were finally free to leave Westminster. “I’ll escort you to your home,” the former servant offered. “No doubt the honourable gentlemen didn’t see fit to keep it habitable.”

“No doubt,” Arabella agreed sourly. “And your help will be appreciated. We have matters to speak about as well.”

“Do we?” he asked, and she nodded but said no more until they arrived at her hotel and collected the Greysteels. Arabella introduced her companion to a pleased Flora and a sceptical Mr Greysteel. Then they caught a cab to Soho-square with all their luggage for the second time in two days. This time, the guard did vacate his post with only a minimal amount of trouble.

They found Soho-square covered in a layer of dust that had accumulated since its owner had fled the country and none of the servants had bothered to cover the furniture before leaving. In the sitting room, a couple of Strange’s notes lay,



abandoned, and Arabella carefully lifted them to her face. A remnant of who he was, who he had been in her long absence. She could see him in his tatty favourite dressing gown, hunched over a small table laden with papers. A sad smile spread over her face.

“You’ll need someone to come clean in here, but at least someone covered the beds,” Childermass proclaimed. “I can see if I can find someone to come in today, if you wish.”

“That would be very kind,” Arabella replied absent-mindedly. “And where do you stay? At Hanover-square?”

Childermass snorted. “No, they’ve locked that up too. It’s not my place anyway. I’m staying in a boarding house on the government’s coin.”

“You could stay here as well, if you wished,” she offered.

“And become your servant instead of Norrell’s or Strange’s? No, I think my days of servitude are over. There is only one magician I would serve, and he hasn’t been seen in England for hundreds of years. Besides, I doubt you’d appreciate the company I keep these days. Vinculus is not fit to be near a lady such as yourself or Miss Greysteel. He’s barely fit to be in mine.”

“Vinculus, do I know that name? It seems oddly familiar.”

“The magician of Threadneedle-street,” Childermass explained. “A fraud in most things, but a valuable resource nonetheless. He’s the one who told your husband that he would be a magician.”

And who had set him on the path that now kept him from her. There were moments when she wished he hadn’t taken up magic, when Arabella imagined them happy in Ashfair, with a couple of children and an estate to manage. But then she remembered how happy magic had made him as well. She would never wish to take that from him.

“If that is all, I’ll take my leave,” Childermass announced.

“It is not all,” Arabella explained. “Flora and I still wish to speak with you about magic, and about what can be done to save my husband. And his former master, I suppose.”

Childermass raised an eyebrow, but he went along with her. Whatever the two women had planned, it promised to be an interesting proposition. They found Flora in one of the guest rooms, spreading new linen on the bed. The fireplace already had a fire crackling away, and she’d brushed all the dust into one corner. It was work that was beneath her, of course, but there was nobody else to do it

and she would not sleep in a room full of dirt.

“Now, Childermass, I would like to know what is being done to help my husband,” Arabella declared.

Childermass raised a vaguely amused eyebrow at the women. “Why, nothing, my lady.”

“But Mr Norrell and Mr Strange are the two most eminent English magicians!” Miss Flora cried. “Does England not need them any longer to guide it through these tumultuous times?”

Childermass smirked at the young woman’s naiveté. A few months of dealing with new magicians who thought the two men modern gods had made him apt at dispelling these illusions most efficiently, yet even he could feel charmed by a pretty young woman’s idealism.

“Whether or not England needs them is besides the point, Miss Greysteel,” he explained. “Our politicians are upset at all that Mr Strange has caused and would rather see him tried for treason than back in England. And as for English magicians – if Mr Norrell and Mr Strange cannot come back to us out of their own accord, what hope do we who we have not a smidgeon of their knowledge have to succeed where they failed.”

Mrs Strange pursed her lips, not yet ready to give up, and Miss Greysteel was similarly determined. They had not come all the way from Venice to just turn back at the slightest hint of difficulty.

“Well, can you at least find out where they are?” Arabella demanded.

Childermass frowned. “I suppose, but I don’t see the point in trying.”

“There’s a spell that I’m sure you know of. I’ve seen Jonathan perform it a thousand times over the years and you must have as well. He takes a bowl of water and moves his hands over it to form a cross, then names the quarters of the surface to narrow on their location.”

“I’m well aware of it,” Childermass admitted. “It would take hours if not days of sitting over a dish without being sure of the outcome, Mrs Strange. We don’t even know which plane of existence Strange and Norrell vanished to, much less the names of places there to narrow down a search. It would be quite tedious work, and likely pointless.”

“You will not do it, then?” Arabella asked harshly.

“I will not,” Childermass confirmed. He had the Raven King’s book to think of, and a gaggle of magicians and ministers that interrupted even that, to his

displeasure. Vinculus, of course, thought it hilarious.

“Then will you teach us how to do it?” Miss Greysteel asked.

Childermass looked at her with his inscrutable dark eyes for a moment, weighing his desire not to become involved against the likelihood that they would leave him alone should he not. Had he known that Mrs Strange planned on going to John Segundus should he decline, he would have told her to do so without a second thought. As he did not, he nodded, slowly.

“It is not a complicated spell, in and of itself,” Childermass explained. “It was one of the first Mr Norrell taught Mr Strange.”

A relieved smile spread over Mrs Strange’s face, while her companion straightened her back with the eagerness of a most dedicated pupil. The three then retired to the former study of Mr Strange, where Childermass found the dusty steel bowl that had been used to cast this spell many times before, while Mrs Strange fetched a pitcher of water. Childermass demonstrated the variations and elements of the spell until the sun began to set on them. Neither woman had managed to reproduce the effect, of course, but both were determined to keep trying. Once he had imparted all the knowledge he had on the subject, Childermass left the house on Soho-square to look for servants for Mrs Strange, secure in the knowledge that this would trouble him no more.



The men were meeting at a coffee house near St George’s Hospital. At first, the esteemed Dr Young had suggested a gentleman’s club he favoured, but the idea was soon shot down by Childermass, who would have had the unenviable task of wrangling Vinculus into a gentleman’s attire for the evening. He had not looked forward to the experience himself, having only been in one such establishment a handful of times, always in Mr Norrell’s company and as his servant. The coffee house in question, owned by a Mr Barnaby and imaginatively named Barnaby’s, was relatively empty this dreary December morning, so the young Miss Barnaby was happy to serve them under the watchful eye of her over-protective father.

Mr Segundus was already there when Childermass and Vinculus arrived. He was sitting at a table set for four but big enough for six, alongside a gentleman who had a number of notes spread out in front of him. When Segundus saw them he beckoned to the man to abandon his study. Both men stood up and greeted them

before they all sat down and started on their coffees, if not their conference. Vinculus of course stared at Miss Barnaby a little too long and a little too deeply. Her father cleared his throat behind the counter and she obediently fluttered back to him.

“Don’t you have enough wives by now?” Childermass asked him.

“Oh, who said anything about another wife?” Vinculus replied cheekily, to the confusion of the two men.

“I’m sorry that I have to be brief, gentlemen,” Dr Young explained before they began. “I need to get back to work soon enough.”

Segundus and Childermass nodded, while Vinculus was too busy staring at the undistinguished art decorating the walls.

“First of all,” Young explained. “You were right in your supposition that the Raven King’s book is not written in English, or at least not entirely. There are some English terms that I managed to identify, but others are very clearly not English. I’ve also discovered a tentative method of telling which words are which, based on the symbols used.”

Young presented them all with a piece of paper grouping the King’s Letters into two categories. Childermass and Segundus leaned forward to look at them and even Vinculus now paid attention.

“The ones on the left side I have identified as letters that represent sounds we also use in the English language. The ones on the right are sounds that are not used in English.” The men looked at the right side and found it much bigger than the one on the left, and each of them wondered what on earth one might use so many sounds for. English was quite varied enough for all of them. “I don’t know which letter represents which sound, in those cases, although I have some theories as to which are vowels and which are not,” Young continued. “As for the words, some I could decipher thanks to the notes on the original, but many more I will need more time with.”

Young drew forth another sheet, this one with a couple of words, most of them from the original prophecy. There was one, written mostly with the faerie symbols, that Young had translated as “magician”. Another, much longer one, was transcribed as “the nameless slave”, while yet another, “fail”, looked mercifully short compared to the other faerie words. Others, like “England”, “river” and “first” were transliterated English words. Still, this did little to illuminate the mystery of the new text written on Vinculus’s skin.

When Young saw their disappointed faces, he smiled slightly. “Don’t despair yet, my friends,” he told them. “I need more time, but I’m quite confident that I can come up with something. It is tedious work, thinking of hypotheses, testing them, and revising them accordingly. I wish there was a less time intensive manner of doing things, but if there is, we haven’t found it yet.”

Before leaving the coffee house, he handed Childermass and Segundus copies of the conclusions he had come to thus far. They both shared a dubious look when he was gone, and there was little doubt amongst them that they wouldn’t get farther than a man of Dr Young’s genius. Each took their copy, though, while Vinculus made eyes at the proprietor’s daughter like the lecher he was.



The man who had once been Stephen Black found one of the guests in his home in just the place he had expected to find him: Jonathan Strange was standing where he always stood, in the great hall of Found-hope, staring at the old tree that sprouted new leaves for the first time in centuries, now that a new king ruled the earth it grew on. Below, the king could feel all the remnants of his torturer slowly dissolve, yet the anger he had held was still palpable and kept the air from truly relaxing. With a brush of his hand, the king dispersed some of it before addressing his guest.

“I do not know what you wish to find here, Mr Strange,” he told the sad and slightly mad magician, “but if you haven’t found it yet, I doubt a few hours of relaxation elsewhere will do any harm.”

Strange stared at the floor beneath his feet intently, then his head shot around and feverish eyes fixed on the king, who found himself reminded of his years in service.

“You were there when he cursed me, were you not?” Strange questioned him sharply.

The king nodded. “You know I was.”

“You saw what he did to me, to us. Can’t you tell me anything about it?”

The king sighed. He had expected this question since the magicians had first arrived in his realm. “I was not who I am now, then. I could not see magic as if it was just another kind of light. I could only marvel at what you and your colleague did. But I will try to look at the ties binding you more closely, even

though it hurts my eyes to do so. For your wife was a dear friend to me and Lady Pole when we had none.”

For a moment, the two men stared at each other and a shared feeling of sympathy and companionship bridged the gap caused by rank and class.

“I miss her,” Jonathan Strange admitted, and the words tore at his heart as the feeling of losing her had all those months ago when he had thought his beloved wife dead. “She’s the best part of me and without her, I feel lost.”

“She is an admirable women,” the king agreed diplomatically. A feeling like the one Strange described Stephen Black had never known.

“She is,” Strange agreed, and a small smile stole upon his face, the constant misery banished for a moment, before he was reminded of his predicament. “What can you tell me about the spell, your majesty? It was not linked to the fairy’s life, I gather, or else it would have dissolved. Unless he is still alive, in some way?”

The king frowned at the disintegrated corpse below his feet. “He is not. It was difficult to kill him, even while he was dismembered and suffocated beneath the earth he was trying to reassemble himself through sheer malice, but he failed. Some traces still linger of the master of Lost-hope, but they are echoes only, and whatever tethers you to this place is like a frayed rope about to tear apart. No, the longer I look at it, the more I see that the curse has nothing to do with my realm. I am sorry to disappoint you.”

Strange let out a deep, weary sigh. “I feared as much. I wish I knew how the spell worked. Why does it only affect us in England, and not here? And why does it affect Norrell as well, when I was the one it was cast upon?”

“Oh, the last one is easy,” a voice behind them said. Mr Norrell had torn himself away from whatever engagement had kept him busy and thus went to look for his colleague. “I chanced upon the answer when I thought about the spell we did, when we laid all of English magic into the hands of the nameless slave. It was sloppy naming, of course, that led to this. The fairy must have cursed the English magician, not bothering in his anger to recall that there are two of us, not just the one stood before him.”

“Or not caring,” Strange added wryly. “I doubt he liked you much better than me, my friend.”

“Well,” Norrell said, a bit flustered, “that might be true.”

“I wonder,” Strange mused, staring at the roots of the old tree again, “if he was this sloppy with his naming, what else he might have been sloppy with? I highly

doubt it was intentional that we could find refuge in Faerie, for one, so it must have been England, and English magic in particular that he called upon to enact the curse. But how could a fairy call upon English magic?”

“Without its King, English magic was free to obey a foreign master,” the king told them. He remembered one such lecture from his time with the gentleman, when he still sought to place Stephen on the English throne to strengthen his hold on English magic, although he had never phrased it like that.

“Can you really discern no more about the spell?” Strange asked, and the king slowly shook his head. “If only there was a spell for revealing spells ...”

“Oh!” Norrell exclaimed, but his outburst was greeted by silence. Norrell, of course, did not notice the baffled expression on Strange’s face; he was too busy staring at empty air and following his own thoughts.

“Are you saying that there is?”

The question drew Norrell back into the present, although it took him a moment to orient himself. “No. But there are many spells of revelation, those that reveal hidden truths, those that reveal what is hidden by a spell, those that reveal one’s true self ... I only know some of them, while I read of others, but maybe one can be adapted to reveal a spell’s nature. Surely such things existed in the days of the Aureate magicians, else many stories we know of make little sense, but they must have seemed the most trivial things, considering they were never written down.”

A new excitement spread through Strange’s being at these words, and he felt a fresh flush of hope. “You have an idea on how to adapt them?”

Norrell smiled sadly. “No, but that was always your talent, not mine. I have every faith in you, my friend, and I will do what I can to help you.”



Mrs Strange and Miss Greysteel spent a couple of frustrating afternoons shut in their drawing room, while a mystified Dr Greysteel had taken to visiting some friends and acquaintances of his that resided in London. He had at first assumed they might like to join him, or call on their own friends, but they insisted that they were fine in the house on Soho-square and needed to settle in first. What Dr Greysteel was not told – indeed, what not even Anna and Jane, the new maids, were told – was that the two young women had a different and rather unsuitable entertainment in mind. The drawing room had been freshly cleaned and aired,

the floor had been waxed and new tablecloths been laid upon the tables, transforming the room from the sad shadow of its former self into a delightful place to host guests for an afternoon tea, yet neither Mrs Strange nor Miss Greysteel noticed. Their minds were wholly fixated on the bowls of water they had placed before them, moving their hands back and forth and frowning at their own reflections.

On the third afternoon, it was Flora who first managed to replace her own face with a different view. It was of the sky, which should not have been possible, given the two and a half stories between the bowl and the open air. Flora almost dropt the bowl and cried in shock at having succeeded.

“Is everything alright, Miss?” Anna called from beyond the closed door, where she had been polishing the brass candlesticks.

“Yes,” Flora assured her, before she turned to her friend and told her in a smaller voice. “It worked. I did it, I think.”

Immediately, Arabella abandoned her own attempt and moved to stand behind Flora to watch over her shoulder, as she repeated the process. This time, it took her two tries for the light to appear again, this time a little bit stronger.

“Faerie,” Arabella breathed. “Try looking there.”

Flora did, but the picture that they saw remained one of clouds in a grey sky. Flora tried again, tried to refine the image, but after a while, Arabella went back to her own bowl, and her own attempt at mastering magic. She tried to imbue her movements with meaning and yet again nothing happened. It frustrated her even more now that Flora succeeded and she thought back on how effortless it had been for her husband to learn and perform magic. He had never needed days to replicate any of the spells Norrell shewed him but once, yet here she was, trying and failing yet again to perform even the simplest bit of magic. Her thoughts drifted to Jonathan as she repeated the movements again and again, and she was so entranced by her recollection that she almost missed the glimmer of light in her own bowl. She blinked at it slowly, then carefully brought her finger down on the still water, before repeating the spell.

All in all, it took both of them a week of repetition to master the spell to look at Faerie, and even longer until one afternoon Arabella finally saw her husband looking back at her from the water. He had a slight smile on his face and she yearned to touch him, but he could not see her. Instead, she saw him talking to Norrell while both men stood in a hall that was oddly familiar to her yet not



familiar at all. She looked at a dance floor where people in extravagant costumes and masques twirled around, and in the midst of it all stood a tree which she did recognise.

“Lost-hope,” she told her friend, who had come to watch what Arabella had found. “They are in Lost-hope.”

Arabella hoped its master was dead and gone and that it was a different place now. Her husband’s smile was a balm for her soul, but it could not quench the burning need to get him back in the least.



When Childermass arrived back at his lodgings, Vinculus was already lounging in his seat and drinking wine. He didn’t bother to greet him and instead focussed on chewing on a grilled chicken leg. He hadn’t even had the decency to leave any for the person who paid for his warm bed and food. After an afternoon consulting with the government on the threat posed by fairies and rogue magicians, Childermass didn’t even care. He just wanted to return to Yorkshire and never meet another magician or politician again.

“Letter arrived for you,” Vinculus told him when he was done with his chicken. He nodded at the small side table next to the door, where Childermass indeed spied a letter. For a moment, he was tempted to just ignore it and go straight to bed, but then the thought of what it might contain didn’t leave him in peace and he got up to fetch it. It was bigger and thicker than letters usually were and his name was written on it in an elegant scrawl that he recognised. The papers still spread on his desk were in the same hand. It was from Dr Young. Suddenly wide awake, he ripped open the letter to see what it contained.

It was a number of sheets of paper, with a note attached explaining that they contained some preliminary translations of the pages on Vinculus’s skin. One of them read:

*“And magic shall return to England*

*As the magicians leave it*

*And my [noun with a suffix indicating a person, possibly: servant] shall take up the [unknown, possibly mantle, duty]*

*And new magicians shall appear*

*And [the people, the general public, a collective noun for persons] shall fear them.  
And when the [unknown] return  
And [chaos? anarchy? A reference to the Prince Regent?] reigns instead of a king  
The [collective noun for people, see above] shall pray for my return  
And their prayers shall be [unknown, probably "answered" or "futile"]"*

Childermass's heart skipped a beat when he read the last line. He hoped Young's first guess was right, and as a Yorkshireman he couldn't help but cheer for the King's return. He read the translation again, then handed the page to Vinculus, who had started to curiously peer over his shoulder. "Well, that's something," the man who was also a book said, while Childermass turned his attention to the next page.

*"Darkness shall drive them [unknown] [unknown]  
[unknown] shall lead them  
To the nameless slave's realm  
The [noun with a suffix indicating a person] shall find them  
And my [possibly: servant] shall lead  
The way through my roads  
And he carries [a spell or magic, a magical instrument or device of some description]  
That shall [unknown] them."*

Another page, this one somewhat less interesting than the previous one. The following pages were glossaries that listed and explained the translations and how Young had arrived at his conclusions. The good doctor had been very thorough in his documentation, but Childermass didn't care to understand the process as long as he had the results, which were better than anything he had come up with. After the glossaries and explanations another couple of snippets had been added, and here Childermass found another bit that was of practical interest to him.

*"To govern the rivers and hills and trees of England  
The magician must swear to be mine forever  
And they shall not [unknown] him  
And obey their commands in my [stead, place]  
As they shall be as my ravens*

*My [unknown] and [unknown].”*

In the morning, Childermass made copies of all of Dr Young’s translations, and the last one he put in the breast pocket of his waistcoat. To govern the rivers and hills of England seemed like something that might come in useful one day, more useful at least than vague prophecies that might foretell the Raven King’s return or his abandonment of England.



“And you really think this might work?” Strange asked Norrell while they stood next to a wide pond in Found-hope’s gardens. It was just a tad too regular to be natural and a tad too disorderly too be artificial, like so many perplexing things found in Faerie. It was a product of the unconscious mind, not of nature or meticulous planning, like the pools of the moors or the ponds in the gardens of Windsor and Buckingham that both magicians had visited before. The surface was placid and undisturbed by midges or breezes in an unnatural way that reflected the cloudy sky accurately.

“I told, you, I have every faith in your work,” Norrell answered, and so they began. It was a tedious process to cast the spell of revealing magic that Strange had cobbled together out of the remembered fragments from Norrell’s mind. It was inefficient in the highest degree, nothing like what Norrell supposed the Aureates had used in their day. The spells were layered together in quite unorthodox ways that reminded Norrell of the architecture of the King’s Roads, but the theory behind them was sound. The spell needed a reflective surface, and he’d assumed a bigger one would be better, so the king had directed them to the pond. Yet none of this mattered as the two magicians focussed on casting their spell; their hands moved in unison, as did their lips, although no whisper left them, until suddenly, the wind picked up and no clouds were seen on the still eerily calm pond.

“That’s the fairy,” Strange said, and Norrell recognised him, even though his features were distorted by rage and magic. And behind them were the heaths and forests of England. Norrell thought he recognised the fields that surrounded Hurlfrew Abbey in his youth, while Strange saw the lands around Ashfair, the coasts at Dover and so many others. And all were turned towards them, their malice directed at the magicians of England. It was a sobering thought, since even

as the fairy crumbled, his bones and flesh turning to ash and dust in front of their eyes, the mute resentment remained.

“He has turned England against us,” Norrell surmised. “He not only used his magic, he turned the land and the stones against us, its waters and trees. They reject us, and that is why we may not return unless we wish to die.”

The hopeless, empty words hit Strange harder than Norrell, but he was not yet willing to give up hope. He had fought logic and reason itself to save his Arabella, and he had succeeded, for all that the Raven King’s prophecy had promised him he’d fail. He would not fail her this time either, not after he had lost her to his own incompetence and inattention.

“At least we now know what we are up against,” he said with false cheer. “There must be a way to convince them to leave us alone. We are as English as they are.”

But Norrell was not as optimistic. He had read all there was to read on English magic and there was no spell to influence all of England. A tree he might manage, or a river. He had only ever attempted to lay English magic at the Raven King’s feet because it already was his. It would only ever obey him. None of these things he told Strange, who clung to his newfound hope with all he had. Yet sooner or later, Norrell thought, even he would realise that their situation was hopeless. Not that it bothered him much, as Faerie had more to offer to him than he had ever thought possible, and the king of Found-hope was a gracious and generous host. But Strange, he thought, would not feel the same. If only he had never married ...



John Childermass had put the note in his breast pocket when Arabella Strange and Flora Greysteel, accompanied by Miss Greysteel’s father, arrived at his lodgings. The owner of the boarding house let them in and Mrs Strange was about to knock when the door opened before her. Childermass blinked like a cat, then stepped aside and let his guests enter.

“I’m afraid we’re not prepared to receive visitors, my lady,” Childermass offered diplomatically. And indeed the rooms he shared with Vinculus were untidy at best, the result of two men living together who either lacked the inclination or time to clean. Every available surface was covered in papers and used plates. Snoring drifted through the walls from Vinculus’s room.

“We shan’t trouble you for long, Childermass,” Arabella promised. “I have found them, they are in Faerie, in the place where I was held captive. I want you to guide me there. Surely you know the way to open the King’s Roads.”

Childermass did; Strange had told him how to do it himself. Doncaster’s spell of revelation and a spell of dissolution, yet he had never tried. “The Roads are a dangerous place, my lady. If you lose your way, you might find yourself wandering forever, never reaching your destination. Your husband would never forgive me if you were lost there,” he explained.

But Arabella Strange had made up her mind months ago, and she was resolved to follow the path she was on. She planted her feet squarely on the ground and squared her shoulders. “If you are that worried about what my husband might think, you should come with me.”

Childermass studied the woman in front of him and tried to find a way to dissuade her, but before he could speak, another did.

“Is this really wise?” Dr Greysteel asked. The words earned him a cold stare from Arabella, while his daughter took his hand.

“Arabella has to do this,” Flora explained. “And it is our duty to support her.”

“The lady’s right,” a rough voice added. Vinculus stood in the door of his room, his torso bare, and he yawned. Then he scratched his chest with no shame at being bare in front of two well-bred ladies. “You’ve got to take her,” he added with a look towards Childermass.

“I don’t have to do anything,” Childermass said.

“I think you do,” Vinculus argued and nodded towards the table where Dr Young’s notes still lay. “And my servant shall lead the way through my roads”

Childermass stared at Vinculus for a long moment, and then at Arabella. Finally he sighed and nodded reluctantly. “I will lead you,” he said.

“Very well, then lead.”

“Now?”

Arabella tilted her head. “Is there any reason to wait?”

“I suppose not,” Childermass admitted, although he would have liked to test the spells first. He turned to the mirror that hung next to his desk and cast the spells, first Doncaster, then a spell of dissolution, as he had seen Strange do before, and then he took Mrs Strange’s hand.

“Hold on tight, my lady,” he warned her, before he touched the glass and they vanished.

Inside the mirror, the world was different. Clouds greater than worlds roiled above their heads yet no breeze touched them. Arabella looked back into the mirror, which hung from a cobwebbed wall that was part of a Gothic arch, and she saw Flora and her father and the strange man on the other side, staring back at her. The road beneath their feet was worn but dusted over after centuries of neglect. A couple of feet away, she saw a lonely old shoe, almost rotted away.

“Your husband certainly didn’t understate when he described this place,” Childermass told her, and Arabella noticed that he still held her hand.

“No, he most certainly didn’t,” she agreed. They shared a look, and then they began walking. It was strange, Arabella found, how they both knew which way to go, and she supposed it was a good sign. They followed the road through complex arches and over impossibly high bridges with an endless expanse of lands below them, until a narrow staircase led them down to a narrow path between old trees that led them past meadows in early spring towards a mansion. The lights inside were bright and laughter rang through the air that smelled of bittersweet memories.

“Is this the place?” Childermass asked.

“I think so,” Arabella said, and stepped towards the great doors. The porter had no mouth, and he admitted them both without question.

Inside, the crowds were as cheery as she remembered, but they had lost the razor-sharp edge that characterised them before. The ballroom looked different as well, although she couldn’t recall what it had looked like before. The longer Arabella looked at the new mansion, the less she remembered its former state. She let her eyes roam over the people assembled, hoping to spy her husband amidst the people. She didn’t see him, but she saw someone else that made her pause.

“Stephen!” she cried, and made her way past the dancers, a slightly confused Childermass on her heels. The king had been making the rounds, as he often did, to see if his subjects were doing their duty or if they were idling away the hours as they had been wont to under their last master. He heard Arabella’s cry and turned around to see her running towards him.

“Lady Pole was so worried about you,” she told him, “and I am also glad to see you well, but why are you still in this place. Are you not free?”

The king frowned at her. “I am as free as I will ever be, Mrs Strange. But this is now my place, and I have to take care of it.”

Only when he said these words did she notice the slim silver circlet on Stephen’s

head and that he bore himself differently than he had before. And while he looked otherwise much unchanged, something at his core was so fundamentally changed he seemed almost like a different person.

“Your majesty,” Childermass greeted and added a bow. “We are looking for the magicians.”

“They are in the observatory,” Stephen told them, and shewed them the way. “Mr Strange will be glad to see you. He talks of little else but how to get back to you, unless Norrell manages to distract him with talk of magic.”

“And how is Mr Norrell?” asked Childermass, who thought his former master would be most unhappy in a place as un-English as Faerie, separated from his books.

“Well, I suppose,” the king replied vaguely. Norrell was busily taking notes about a great many things and talked to his subjects until they were quite sick of listening, but whether or not that indicated that the man was well, he didn’t know.

Norrell and Strange were deep in discussion when they entered the observatory. Childermass took the time to look at the stars above them. It was a foreign sky, and he could have sworn it had been no later than early afternoon when they entered Found-hope, yet in here it seemed to be midnight.

“But if we combine a spell of –”

“It won’t work,” Norrell argued. “We’d only anger them more. We –” he stopt himself when he saw that others had arrived, and his eyes widened when he saw Arabella, which caused Strange to turn around as well.

“Bell!” he exclaimed, a huge grin spreading on his face as he hastened to her side. The couple smiled at each other and Strange carefully took his wife’s hand. “What are you doing here?”

Arabella Strange had tears of happiness in her eyes now that she finally saw him again and her heart was fit to burst. He looked better than he had the last time; Faerie agreed with him. “You didn’t expect me to just wait, did you?”

“I didn’t expect to see you here. How did you even get here?”

At that, Childermass cleared his throat. “Your wife insisted,” he explained with a shrug.

“I did,” Arabella agreed. “You are my husband, and we promised to stand by each other in the good days and the bad and I love you, Jonathan. I couldn’t bear to never see you again and I would always worry, no matter how hard I tried not to

think of you. If you are cursed, so am I, and I would rather be at your side and suffer the consequences with you than to live half a life.”

“Oh, Bell,” Strange told his wife, “if only you knew what this meant. There is no way to break the curse. Norrell and I have tried everything. The fairy was thorough. I fear I can never return to England, not in the next hundred years, and I would hate to take you away from Henry and your friends.”

But Arabella was determined not to give up and while she and her husband argued, Childermass walked over to his former master. The king had not lied when he said that Norrell seemed well. Apparently there was more of a magician in the scholar than he had thought.

“That curse,” he asked, “have you at least found out how it works, or is it still as much of a mystery as it was when Strange was in Venice?”

“Oh, we’ve found that out. It was quite a feat of magic, but that does not explain how you come to walk the King’s Roads,” Norrell said with an air of suspicion that had so long coloured his talk of other magicians.

Childermass simply smiled. “I picked up some things along the way, as you well know. Maybe more than you thought, but you always knew that I was not as uneducated in the ways of magic as I pretended to be. Or at the very least, you made a conscious effort not to know.”

The statement took Norrell aback. He had taught Childermass a handful of useful little spells. Minor magic, something to help him in his work as Norrell’s servant, but to open the way to the Roads, that was far beyond anything he had taught him, and the old fear of others tainting English magic rose in him again.

“You will have to cease this nonsense,” he declared.

Childermass laughed so loud it temporarily even distracted Strange and his wife from their circular arguments and it greatly vexed Norrell. “I am no longer your servant, Mr Norrell. You can not order me to do anything, and should you ever return to England, you will find it much changed. There’s a magician on every corner now and England’s politicians blame it on you and Strange. They would be very glad to never see your face again.”

“And they never will,” Norrell sighed bitterly. He had dedicated his life to English magic and now it was wild and out of control and all the things he’d worked so hard to prevent. He had failed, just as the prophecy had predicted. It was a sobering thought. “The fairy has turned England itself against Strange and myself, so there is nothing we can do.”



Childermass went abruptly still. Vinculus had been right, he thought. He reached into his breast pocket to fish out the note he'd written that morning. He looked at the words again and then offered it to Norrell, who look at it sceptically.

"What is that?"

"It's an excerpt from the Raven King's book. Yes, I've found it," he added at Norrell's incredulous look. "And no, you can't have it. It's not the kind of book you can own."

But Norrell's eyes were busy rushing over the page, then re-reading it again. He pursed his lips when he realised what he would have to do to be free. To swear service to another magician was no little thing, and to swear service to the greatest of them all was even more dangerous still. Who knew what he would demand in return, but then he looked at Strange, who still talked to his wife and smiled sadly at her, and he knew that he had no choice.

"Strange!" he called, waving the paper about. "Childermass brought us a possible solution to our problems."

Strange and Arabella exchanged a hopeful look as they walked over to them and Strange took the note. He read it with a smile on his face that first brightened, then dimmed. "It is a nice idea," he admitted, "but there are two problems with this. I have no idea how a magician formally swears allegiance, and we do not know who to swear allegiance to – Norrell and I had this dilemma before, when we were trying to summon him. Nobody knows the Raven King's name."

"Wouldn't Raven King suffice?" Arabella asked, and her husband shook his head reiterating all the reasons why a name had to be precise and accurate for a spell to work while Norrell went to the notes he and Strange had been standing over when Childermass and Arabella arrived. He brushed most of them aside and leafed through the rest until he found what he looked for. A small scrap of paper with a long string of nonsensical sounds scribbled onto it.

"I know the king's name," he announced, not as happily as either Childermass or Strange would have, but he had never idolised the great magician, even if he had learned to respect him. "And I know how to swear fealty as well. 'Tis a simple thing. A few drops of blood, and swearing on your magic and with it, but I will warn you, my friend, that oaths made this way need to be kept."

Strange stared at the letters on the page and then looked at Norrell for a long time. The two had shared much over the years, from conversations to theories, but this one point, they had always disagreed on.

“This is my chance to be free,” Strange explained to his friend. “And I would serve the King whether it brought me advantages are not. He is English magic.”

Norrell shook his head. “He is a man. He has always been a man, and men can be cruel and ask more of you than you are willing to give.”

“I will do it anyway,” Strange said, and Norrell could see he held his wife’s hand in his own. She would always take precedence.

“And I will stay a little longer, if his majesty has no objections,” Norrell said, looking at the king of Found-hope, who had stood back and watched as his guests planned and argued. He slightly inclined his head and the light glinted off the silver crown in his hair.

And so Strange cut his hand with a paper knife supplied by the king and swore a vow to the Raven King. It was a short affair, and lacked in ceremony, but Norrell was positive that it had worked, at least as positive as he could be until Strange tried to leave. That in itself would be the true test, but he had already resigned himself to work on his studies alone for the time being. He nonetheless handed Strange most of the notes he had assembled during his time in Found-hope.

“They will be of more use in England with you than here with me,” he told his friend.

“I will visit, that I promise,” Strange told him. “Although I have to admit I wish you would swear yourself to the Raven King as well. I hate to leave you behind.”

But not as much as he would hate to leave his wife alone, they both knew, and so they said their goodbyes. The king escorted Strange, Arabella and Childermass to the gate, and there, Arabella stopt to speak to the man who had once been her friend.

“I’m sure Lady Pole would wish to know how you are. Is there anything you would have me tell her?” she asked.

The king thought for a moment. “Tell her that I am who I was always meant to become,” he said.

Arabella nodded, and smiled, wondering if she would ever see him again as the path that lay in front of her was bathed in twilight. Jonathan took her hand and together, they walked home.



Ashfair had changed little in the year its owners had been absent. It still looked

just a little bit odd and old-fashioned, a quiet country residence, which was quite a contrast to London, Venice and Found-hope. But it was home, and the Stranges were glad to have some time to themselves after the excitement of London. Childermass had been right; the ministers were not glad to see their rogue magician return, no matter how harmless he seemed. They only reluctantly let him be when the Duke of Wellington pointed out that Strange hadn't actually broken any law, no matter how much they might wish differently. Still, a great many fashionable Londoners gossiped behind his back, especially when he contrived to have his book re-published.

In the following weeks, many, many prospective students called on Jonathan Strange, but he only agreed to take on one: Miss Greysteel. Her father had resigned himself to her interest at last, but still insisted on Mrs Strange as a chaperone – who was only too happy to oblige. None of this stopt the endless stream of well-wishers, petitioners and the curious at their door. It was so exhausting that they decided to retire to the countryside for a few months.

“And what will you do now?” Arabella asked her husband when they had settled down for their first evening back in Shropshire. She was working on her embroidery and Strange had some of Norrell's notes spread out in front of him.

“Well, after all that has happened, I have enough for another book,” he told her with a smile. They'd been here before, and Arabella smiled back. “And we were talking about children before. Maybe we can resume where we left of?”

Arabella liked that suggestion very much.



In a dark hall, on a black throne, sat a man, and he smiled.

*Fin*

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<sup>1</sup> Paris Ormskirk's *Revelations of Thirty-Six Other Worlds* is the most comprehensive telling of the worlds beyond our borders but its accuracy has been widely disputed in more recent times. At least five of the "worlds" he mentions have been proven to be neighbouring kingdoms of Faerie engaged in a perpetual series of wars with each other over a patch of land called Where-sadness-lies-buried-under-a-cloud. Three others are located in a part of Hell. Only six are currently argued to be actual worlds by most writers. Four of those are our world, Faerie, Heaven and Hell.

<sup>2</sup> Norrell here refers to an incident when Lanchester, in his role as seneschal, spoke justice in his master's name. The case was convoluted and involved no less than sixteen witnesses describing the same event (an escalated argument between two noblemen on the streets of York) in different and contradicting ways. After two days of deliberation, Lanchester called the witnesses and the accused to the scene of the crime and called on the stones of York to curse all those who bore false witness to become as silent as stone. None of the people present ever said another word, the truth was never revealed and the people of York considered the matter settled since whoever was guilty was already punished.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Norrell, although the most eminent magical scholar of his age, never published a single work, not even a short article, and neither did he edit any of his collaborators' works nor add a single preface. His notes and correspondence however have been invaluable to the study of English magic since his death and remain so to this day, while he contributed much to the work of those who knew (and even hated) him. His importance cannot be overstated.

<sup>4</sup> What happened to the court or its king remain a mystery. All that is known is that they existed at the time of the Raven King's birth and that they didn't at the time of Norrell's and Strange's foray into Faerie. Their location is equally uncertain and all speculations to it are unfounded at best. No fairy has yet deigned to enlighten a scholar on these matters.

<sup>5</sup> See Alessandro Simonelli's memoirs