

When he opened his eyes, everything around him screamed in static. A bleak wind curdled in his soul as he lie there, motionless; purposeless; helpless; placeless. He knew he was nowhere, but Sean could not further comprehend what that nowhere quite was.

All he knew was that what was below him felt like sand that rolled in warm waves of infinity, and what lie above was a cold place that none could touch.

I woke up from my desk with a gasp, pulling my porcelain masked face away from the drool that had spewed itself from my mouth while I slept. My eyes fluttered as I groaned and pulled my frilled white lace sleeve up my blue lips, slowly wiping the drool off my mouth in a black, inky smear.

“F-f-f-fuuuuck why does my whole body feel like a tuning fork...” I muttered aimlessly to myself as I collapsed backwards into my Librarian’s Chair. I briefly nuzzled my back and long hair into the plush velvet cushions before sliding my hands down to hold my belly... except... something about it didn’t feel quite right.

I squished my fingers into my gut a few times, my mind slowly processing the information from my senses before finally landing home and sparking my consciousness. I was there one moment, and then gone the next, my vision of the library painted away as a visual memory replaced it. My hands... the way they held my lower gut...?

I could see images of larger clothing flashing in front of me, and feeling like none of it would fit. But now, as the memory faded from my vision and I looked down at myself in comparison, my belly only looked maybe a month or two along. I felt so... light. My Burden had swollen into triplets before I had passed out.

Speaking of which... why did I pass out? I haven’t napped in hundreds of years... I remember... there was another issue I was correcting. Some sort of... reaction?

My mind circled for a few moments while my fingers traced circles around my puffy gut, cradling the soft bump for a moment before leaping off. With swift accuracy, I placed them on the home row of my wood and brass keyboard.

“...shit... what if...” I didn’t think much about what was coming out of my mouth, I was too busy dashing a string of commands into FateFiler.

I gazed into it’s monitor - an ancient cathode ray, gas tube powered affair that flickered with an unusually fast refresh rate - and watched as the console returned the environment report I was looking for.

The Exception Record.

*Exception Detected: Irredeemable fracture at address 24938.45932.05921, Dimension Nu. Applied automatic resolution: Chapter Rollback. Continuance from most safe temporal point recommended. REMINDER: Continual interventions in astral flow may cause **unsustainable operating conditions**; use emergency services sparingly until stabilization controls are integrated.*

An exception.

An... *irredeemable* exception.

An *irredeemable* exception... within Nu. **The Library**.

“Fuck.”

The word echoed in the Observatory for a moment as I lept up from my chair, the device rolling backwards on its floor-bound track a few inches while I spun around, eyes scanning the room.

The windows behind me were still each observing a our lovely little blue sphere dotted with white clouds hanging in space, but each blue sphere was slightly different in its makeup and patterns than the others. The Observatory’s Windows.

In front of me, my holographic command table was still in the middle of the room, powered down and lying dormant, while the twenty stacks of books, ten to a side, five to a floor were still rolled out in front of me towards the massive double doors that allowed entry into this secure part of the Library.

Not a single book was out of place and not a single candle in the two story wood-paneled room wasn’t lit.

Everything was as it was, except nothing felt like it did.

Something was missing.

Some**one** was missing?

My face scrunched up for a moment while my mind howled again. There was something there, something far in the back that my body was aching to remember, but the shapes and images felt blurry and distorted. How could this be happening? There’s never been an exception in Nu before... The Librarian Documentation never said anything about this happening here, and I knew those files by heart, soul, and mind... I had to read the user manual for years before I was let out of that room, after all...

A gasp finally let loose from my lips as the mosaic in my mind finally began to snap together. I turned back around to my desk and grabbed the intercom microphone from the table, wrapping my slender, black clawed fingers around it before depressing the prominent red key and speaking softly into it.

“Head Librarian for Unrequited Soul 632, please report to Dimensional Observatory. 632, please report to Dimensional Observatory, post haste.”

Before I could even let my finger off of the switch, one of the double doors at the far end of the hall creaked open. A smaller man, dressed in humble brown and tattered linen robes let himself in. His stature was only 5’ 9”, but he carried himself with a smile as he walked forwards through the room, a chalkboard in his grip and a small journal and quill on his hip. He gave a quiet wave to me as he approached me, his sandaled steps lightly echoing throughout the room.

“Well that was oddly convenient,” I muttered to herself before putting the heavy metal microphone back on my desk next to the keyboard.

“Okay, so, hi. Good morning and all that. Weird question: Do you remember us doing something recently? Like something that felt dreadfully important... but every time you think about it, it’s either a blur or it hurts so much your brain wants to leak straight through your nose?”

632 blinked a few times at the rapid-fire series of questions that I had launched at him before slowly shaking his head back and forth.

“...you don’t remember me... uhhhh... rounder?”

632 stared at me blankly and shrugged.

“Like fatter.”

He shook his head again.

“Not even bulbous?”

He kept shaking his head, ceasing to stop shaking it at this point.

“Okayyyyy, I got the point. So, final question, then I’ll stop being weird for at least 3 seconds, give or take 3 seconds... Were we doing nothing for a while? Is that what you remember?”
632 finally stopped shaking his head, thought about it for a moment, and then finally agreed with me.

He was right. It’s the last thing I clearly remember too: I had mentioned something about it being a record set of weeks because of how smoothly everything had been going. While I still wanted 632 to get his ass out, go back to the Timed Realms and leave, I had honestly grown

accustomed to having him around for all of these years. Lesser mortals would have gone mad at the captivity, but 632 simply keeps reading all of the Library's logs, records, and visiting the various rooms. He always seems so fascinated by them.

At this point I just started handing him things to do. Surprisingly, he wasn't bad at many of them and, with his help, the Library has never been so... quiet. Oddly. Quiet.

"That's it," I finally said, snapping my fingers.

632's eyebrows raised.

"It's quiet in here. Normally there's more grinding, more printing, more... motion, you know? Dead Letters produce Logs. Logs get filed in the Books. Books get filed in Stacks. Stacks get moved around through Palette Transit. All of that makes such ambient noise that I've... gotten used to it?" I said, unsure of even myself as I said that out loud and looked around again.

632 tapped me on the shoulder and I turned back around to him. He gave my arm a soft squeeze while his middle aged cheeks pulled into a warm smile, comforting me for a moment. I let my hand finally drop defensively off of my stomach and down to my side and I nodded firmly to him.

"You're right. I'm probably being slightly overzealous here. It's just... I can't help shake the feeling like we were doing something else. Or I was doing something else. Or there was someone..."

As I said that to my slightly shorter friend, one of the high-pitched klaxon alarms began to go off behind me, breaking both the moment and the silence. 632 ducked slightly and grabbed at his ears while I turned around and ducked my white tails out of my view to get a clear look at my desk.

None of the alarm lights on the Dimensional Windows were going off... but the one on my desk was. A small red light that was built slightly under my desk was blinking rapidly, illuminating my chair in quick, severe flashes that drew me in without further notice.

By the time I got back to my monitor, FateFiler's console was already replaced with a new security view of the outside. The picture wasn't in full color, only black and white, but it was enough to identify what we needed to identify.

I had to lean in to see it, but there it was, no bigger than an ant larva. A black speck slightly wiggling around on the pale waves that lapped around the Library's round base.

632's stubby finger pushed into my view and against the monitor's glass, slightly smudging it. When I looked back at him, his mouth was agape and he was clearly waiting for me to say something.

“Yeah. Get the scoop. I think that’s a fucking soul on the sea.”

He didn’t know when it came, but when it closed around him, it was cold, dark, and quiet. Whatever it was, it moved with purpose, and that thought echoed in his core.

The purpose felt familiar, but the thought was shunted away like a magnet approaching its polar opposite.

That’s when sleep came again.

I placed my finger on the man’s cold, clammy neck after he was unceremoniously dumped out of The Scoop’s vacuum tube along with excess sea crystals. The small fractions of crystal nothingness rolled over and off his body in thick drips through the grate on the floor, another suction pump pushing the stuff back outside. It wouldn’t be long before he was fully cleaned up and dry again, but the same couldn’t be said for his health.

632’s chalkboard came into my peripheral view as I once again tried to find a pulse. “Is he going to be alright?”

Tsk. “Not the time.”

I ripped open the man’s office shirt, taking a moment to overlook his slightly toned body. He definitely had some dad bod going on, but by his muscle structure he was at least trying to hit the gym when he could.

Good, maybe he could take some chest compressions from me without cracking a rib. I perched myself directly on top of him, doing my best to keep my stomach pooge out of the way, and I wrapped my claws over the center of his chest. With precision, I counted to myself as my hands pushed into his chest again, and again, and again, and again. I didn’t have to press against him hard, I already knew I was stronger than the two of them combined, and more of my concentration was put towards making sure I held my strength back the appropriate amount.

I moved back to his mouth and opened his lips, tightly pinching his nose as I took a breath in as far as I could before blowing back out into his mouth with a sealed kiss.

I didn’t have to go another round, amazingly. Office boy reacted and violently twitched onto his side, vomiting up more nothingness into the grate with a rancid groan. I held him steady as he forced air back into his lungs on his own; taking in long, harsh, distorted breaths.

Somehow, his glasses had remained in his front shirt pocket throughout the whole ordeal. I slowly pulled them out and placed them on to his face, pushing the temples over his ears and through his sandy blonde hair.

His eyes slowly opened and he looked up into my mask, into my eyes, into me.

I felt the cold icepick inside of me crack against my guts at the same time the sound came out of his lips. It was a single word.

My name.

"Mystery," he croaked.

I recoiled. The pressure built in my stomach and my skirt divoted into my belly. My Burden grew. He fell back unconscious, energy drained from his experience.

I pulled myself up with the same amount of purpose as I always had, but as much as I tried to hide it, I know my hands were shaking. 632 had to have noticed it.

I looked at him and then found myself looking away. That feeling was still knocking at the back of my mind, and it was louder now.

"How the fuck did he know my name?" I asked.

"But even more importantly... who the fuck IS this guy?"