

The Nameless One

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Many years ago a small boy awoke in the night, to the sound of a scream. He dismissed the scream as the echo of a fading dream, clutching his tiny hidden dagger none the less, and turned over to go back to sleep. Sleep, however, was not a luxury he would regain this night.

Beyond this boy's room, in the town known as Valaria, the town drunk stumbled slowly towards what he believed to be his home. He looked up to the night sky to see the full moon turn a deep, blood, red. Knowing nothing of lunar eclipses, the drunk stared on, as this amazing spectacle unfolded, wondering if perhaps this was a portent of doom. At this hour, alas, there was no one awake to ask.

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Far away in a tower high above any other structure in the surrounding realm, a man cloaked in darkness reads carefully from an ancient tome. The book is from another time. The man has not left this tower in over five years, and the people of the surrounding area like that just fine. As the man reads on, the room seems to shift ever so slightly. The flasks and books on the shelves seem to stir with a life of their own, as if they were merely sleeping on the shelves, waiting to be awakened by these magical words.

The wizard in the tower has spent many months preparing for this moment. As the planet this mage rides on slips between its only moon and its sun, he finishes his incantation. The energy that has built up in the room immediately coalesces around the mage, making his body quake with power. The force inside him builds, until his body begins to glow, brighter and brighter, until the walls themselves permanently retain the shadows cast upon them.

Finally, in a burst of pure blue light, seen for miles by those unfortunate enough to be awake, the mage disappears. Nothing but the books, and the shadows on the walls remain.

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Thousands of miles away, as a drunk stares at the reddening moon, a blue flash of light appears behind him. Where the flash dissipates, a tall dark man now stands. Turning to see what caused the flash, the drunk sees the man, and steps into an alley to hide. This may well have been the smartest thing he has ever done, for the man seems to radiate a dark foreboding power. He seems, at least to the drunk, to be a man to stay away from. The drunk, if nothing else, is a good judge of character.

The mage seems to reel, as he slowly gains his bearings.

"Yes." He mutters, "This seems to be the place. The Moon is right, the stars are right. I have arrived intact. Now to the matter at hand."

Purposely, the Wizard steps to the door of an nearby house. He seems to know where he is going, even though the drunk's hazy mind cannot seem to remember seeing this mage in town before. As he approaches the door, the wizard pulls from his robe a small chime. Faintly the drunk hears the chime

peal, as the locked door swings open. Hastily replacing the small bell in his robes, the mage steps inside, shutting the door silently behind him. By morning, the drunk will have forgotten the whole event.

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The man awoke slowly. He always awoke slowly, and it had nearly been the death of him more than once.

As Consciousness came to him, he starts to realize there is a tall imposing figure at the foot of the bed. Why would there be a man in his room? he wondered. Why would a tall dark man with a big staff be standing at the foot of his bed? Slowly, as his mind coalesces, he realizes the portent of the shape at the foot of the bed: A wizard!

The wizard at the foot of the bed seems to enjoy the look of horror on the slowly wakening man. As the man finally seems to awaken, the mage very softly whispers.

"Do not utter a sound."

"Do not move a muscle or bat an eye."

"I know who you are, and better yet who you were."

"I have one thing to say to you, sir."

At this the man in bed seems to realize his danger. He starts to rise out of bed and finally take action. This is the last thing he will do of his own free will.

The mage lifts his staff and firmly speaks one word.

"GILGERON"

Silence follows, and the man in bed is still. Not in such a way that one might relax, but frozen, like a statue. The woman beside him starts to stir, and in the next room, a small child seems to shuffle.

"If she wakes, she dies"

This evil mage it seems, means business.

"Well, mighty Gilgeron, it seems my research was correct. I have found you and your true name!"

"Before I dispatch you, I will tell you this: I am now the greatest sorcerer in this land or any other. I have long ago surpassed you and all you have taught me. I am however, in need of something very important to complete my journey to complete power."

"Ah, I can see by your interest, you wish to know more. Good, I love a captive audience."

"You see my dear Gilgeron, I wish to be ruler of this world and all those beyond. To accomplish this, I have made certain deals I will not discuss with you. Now there are certain conditions I must satisfy."

"To make a long story short, my dear fellow, I need your brain."

"Do not worry, old man, I will be merciful in your demise, though I do rather enjoy the death throes of mortals."

"I will however have one last pleasure: the eradication of your family in front of your living eyes. Behold"

With a wave of his cloaked hand, he causes the man's wife to suddenly awaken. She sits bolt upright and upon seeing her frozen husband and the black figure at the end of the bed lets out a shriek of terror. The wizard merely smiles and whispers to the woman.

"Kill."

The woman topples to the bed, as if some higher force pulled the soul from her body. There was no scream, no cry of despair. She simply ceased to live.

The dark mage, still smiling, as if proud of his power, turns back to the man and pulls a large red gem from his robes.

The mage gestures in the air, always keeping the gem in front of his victim, and mumbling in an ancient tongue.

Just as the mage finishes his incantation, a small boy, just waking from a nightmare, wanders into the room holding a small dagger to ward off the demons of sleep. The boy, having just realized that reality can be far worse than any nightmare, looks on as his father's body and soul are twisted in shape and drawn into the red gem as water would be drawn into a drain.

The mage, having accomplished his goal, holds the gem high above his head and howls with glee.

"At last my mentor, I have you where only I can control you. You will be forever mine, if I choose, or perhaps I will leave you in the treasure of some red dragon to rot for a thousand years."

"And then, only when I decide you have suffered enough for a thousand men, will I come for you and take your brain!"

The boy, getting courage from the loss of his family, and the scene of horror before him, runs toward the mage screaming for the demise of the evil man, brandishing his little weapon.

The mage, always prepared for battle, gestures to the boy and utters a few choice words. The boy stops, as if held by an unseen force, while the mage studies him.

"So, my little hero. Did you think you could stop me? Did you really think you could stop the greatest wizard of all time from his inescapable destiny?!"

The boy, having no control over his body, merely listens in horror.

"Did you truly have the audacity to even consider you could kill me? Could this magnificent gem of ludicrous news be in fact sooth?"

The mage laughs openly now, reveling in his evil and his power as the boy helplessly looks on.

After a short while, the mage grows tired of this ploy, and comes back to the matter at hand.

"My dear little boy. You have no idea what you have involved yourself in. None whatsoever."

"I think that you need to learn that certain things should not be meddled in. I think now is a good time for you to learn this, as you have meddled in the worst possible thing, apart from summoning a demon from the abyss itself!" The mage was roaring now, obviously teetering on the edge of some internal precipice of rationality.

"What would remind you to keep your little nose where it belongs, hmmm?"

"What would keep you from ever forgetting this moment, I wonder..."

The dark mage seems to calm suddenly, and ponder what evil he could manufacture to get his nasty lesson across. Pacing across the room, he brings his hand to his chin in deep thought. As with all his thoughts, this one consumes him, at least for the moment.

"Ah", He whispers, "Perhaps this will teach you a lesson."

The mage reaches over and touches the boy's dead mother, and she suddenly rises from the bed and stands facing the mage. The loving mother-turned-zombie nods as the mage whispers in her ear. The mage takes the large gem and hands it to the dead woman, and stands back to watch in morbid fascination.

The boy's living dead mother takes the red gem that contains her husband and walks directly over to her son. Grabbing the face of the boy with one hand as she might have done lovingly the night before, she takes the gem with the other hand and slides the razor sharp edge of the jewel down the left cheek of the small boy.

Not being able to cry out or scream, the boy silently endures both the psychological agony of his dead mother lacerating his face, and the physical torture of his face being separated from his skull. Both are pains he will never forget.

Seeing that his will has been satisfied, the mage gestures to the zombie-mother, and she becomes lifeless once again, falling at the foot of her tortured son. The mage begins his farewell.

"My dear boy, I grow tired of this game. I will leave you now to your pain, and to your thoughts. I sincerely hope you have learned your lesson, as you undoubtedly will have a meaningless life from this day hence."

"I'm sure your pain is great, but just as your dear mother must have told you, pain builds character."

The evil mage gestures towards the boy, and the boy crumples to the ground, somehow released from his unholy paralysis. Grasping his badly bleeding face, he does not cry, as a you would expect a boy his age to do, but only glares hatefully at the mage.

"Don't you have anything to say for yourself, son?" queries the mage.

After a thoughtful pause, the boy only says one thing.

"You will pay."

The mage chuckles at first, then laughs with growing fervor. Finally able to restrain himself no longer, he utters a final incantation between guffaws. In the blink of an eye, he is gone, leaving only the echoes of his hateful laughter.

The boy falls to the floor, entering a state we now call shock. His subconscious replays one phrase over and over for the next fifteen years, until they take on new meaning, and are finally realized.

"You will pay..."

Message From the Past

After an indeterminate amount of time (Hours? Weeks?), the boy comes to his senses. Not noticing the incredible amount of blood caked to his face and hands, he stands up. Moving as if driven by an unseen hand, the boy, seeming to show no emotion, walks over to the bed, where his loving parents had slept not long ago, and pulled off the sheet. He brings it over to the blood-stained corner and wraps his mother's still form in it.

After determining that there was no way he could carry her body, he resigns himself to the task of dragging his mother's body downstairs, and outside to the family crypt.

He never really decided that he would do this by himself. It was never really a question in his mind. It was simply a burden he knew he must bear alone.

After dragging the body as respectfully as possible under the circumstances, he manages to get it outside to the door of the crypt.

While most families had resigned their loved ones to cemeteries these days, the more affluent still had crypts. This particular tomb seemed to be nothing more than a storm cellar with a large iron door. Like an iceberg, most of this structure was underground.

Retrieving the key from his pocket (Thinking back, he never could recall having picked it up anywhere), he unlocks the heavy door. Weight, and many years of rust, combine to make opening the door quite a task unto itself. With a garden tool and a little strength, he manages to pry open the heavy door.

Inside the door, darkness seems to take on a life of its own. Spiders and tiny nameless insects retreat from the encroaching moonlight back to the safe haven of that living darkness. Having failed to foresee the utter blackness of the crypt, the boy pauses to get a lantern. His father had always kept one in a pack in a small storage space near the back door. Having recovered the light, he brings it to its most powerful beam, thereby pushing back mankind's most primal fear.

Having never been allowed to explore the crypt (and maybe, never wanting to,) he takes it all in for the very first time.

The doorway opens into a steeply downward sloping passage, made from fitted stone on all sides. As the passage reaches its bottom, it opens into a large chamber. Lined against the walls, are a series of sarcophagi, all made from granite, with very large lids.

The room is rank with moisture and filled with the silence of the dead. The tombs seem to quietly recognize his valid presence here, and grant him entrance, thus causing no real fear in the boy. Of the ten graves in the room, only four are empty, the rest having been long ago sealed by the boys own ancestors.

The sarcophagi circle the room, lying parallel to the walls, along both sides. In the back of the room a small granite box stands as if it were a smaller version of the tombs that surround it. This box, the boy knew, must be left alone, as it contains some sort of powerful protection for the deceased family.

His cursory glance done, the boy goes outside to retrieve his mother's body. Showing the same delicate care he used in the house, he drags her still form down to the cavern below.

Placing the lantern on the lid of a neighboring vault, he lifts her body up over the lid. With an unceremonious thump, she flips over the top and falls into the large granite container. Gasping for breath, the boy decides to take a short break and examine the cave further.

Gathering up his lantern he circles the room again, this time on the outside of the graves. When he reaches the small box in the back of the cave, he is frozen in terror as a voice interrupted the silence.

"Son." the voice whispers.

"If you are hearing this, then your mother or myself are dead or gone, and you are here to put us to rest. "

There is an almost imperceptible pause, where the boy wonders what "gone" could mean, then recalls the scene of his father being sucked into the large gem that would later cut his own face.

The voice continues.

"You, my son, will need an advantage in this world, and behind this door you will find it, if you so choose."

Again, a small pause.

"Repeat my last word son. Goodbye, and remember I love you. The word is NEBULOSITY"

After a short silence where the boy ensures himself that there is no more to the message, the boy ponders his situation. Deciding he has nothing to lose, he repeats the word, as requested by his father's mysterious voice.

"NEBULOSITY"

As he finishes the last syllable, a small outline becomes apparent in the rock. Barely perceptible at first, but rapidly sliding outward, is a door concealed in the rock wall.

As the door slides to its new resting place, the boy sees a light shining from beyond the new passage, seeming to beckon him in. Deciding his father's words must be true, though he had no idea how they came to be, he ventures in.

After walking through a small tunnel that seemed to curve slightly to the left, the boy finds himself in a very small cave. The only thing in this cave is a pedestal which supports a large leather bound book. The room is lit by a light source in the cavern's ceiling. The light fascinates the boy as it does not seem to waver, as does his lantern, but is steady, like the light of the sun.

Remembering his father's disembodied message, he moves to the pedestal and the book upon it. The book is large, about a foot wide at the top, and about a foot and a half long at the side. The cover seems to shimmer and dance, as if it weren't really there, but really part of a dream magically removed from the realm of sleep and transported to this room.

The boy reaches out and runs his hand along the book and feels a kind of odd tingling, almost like the tiny shocks you feel when you rub a thick sweater on a cold dry day. His heart pumping with the adventure, he opens the book, having absolutely no idea what to expect next.

Folded before the first page lay a note. Retrieving the note, the boy reads silently to himself.

My dearest son. If you have come this far, then I can only assume that I am either dead, or my very being has been rent from this plane of existence by some greater force. I know this because the magic that let you hear my voice, made sure that this was the case before you were to hear the message. I pray your mother has not befallen the same fate, but if she has, then you must be even stronger now.

There are many things you do not know about me, my son. The greatest being that I am a wizard. I was a good wizard, some say the best of my time, and I taught many a good pupil my craft. I have been to many great lands, and met many great people. I have fought great beasts from other dimensions, and helped innocent children beat hunger and oppression. Then I met your mother, fell in love, and chose to abandon my chosen profession to raise a family. You were born, and my world was full of joy.

I vowed to never risk my life in any way again, and stay home to protect my family. It would seem, in this matter, I was remiss.

At any rate you are here, and times must surely seem dire indeed. Take heart, my son, for you have shown great promise in the arcane arts! When you were a baby, I could feel the power in you, and I hoped, in my heart, that someday you would take up that which I loved so well.

Now you have a need for advantage in this world, as you now are at the mercy of its denizens. If you so choose, take this book, and bring it in secret to the master at Polk Tower. He will know you, and will know your plight, as he is as powerful as they come. Respect him, and he will teach you well.

The book before you contains all the spells you will need to become a practicing mage. Guard it well. Heed the Master's word, and protect your families honor.

One last note my son. In this world, magic has its roots in the naming of things. If you know a person's true name, you can know his soul. If I am dead, then I shall look forward to seeing you in the next life. If I am somehow imprisoned and the death of your mother has brought you here, then you will need this if you will attempt to free me:

My name is Gilgeron

Share this with no one. If you do decide to find me, do so only at the Master's approval, as it will undoubtedly be a most dangerous undertaking.

This note is magic, and no one but yourself may read it. The book itself is of course, magic, and only a mage may read it. Take care however, for an evil mage may try to take it from you. Transport it in secret.

Farewell my son. May that you accomplish whatever you set out to do in life, and may you forever be happy.

Your Father.

The tears streaming down his bloody cheeks, the boy folds the note carefully back into the book. He gathers the book and silently goes back to the task of arranging his mother's body.

Having laid her to rest as best he could, he rolls the lid on top of the tomb, and removed the wooden rollers from under the lid, as his father had described to him once long ago.

His task completed, and a new feeling of purpose welling up within him, the boy turns to gaze at this, his mother's grave, one last time. He notices that the secret door is again closed, and he whispers one last time:

"Goodbye mother. I love you."

He steps outside the iron door and swings it closed. His spell book in hand, he goes inside and recovered his father's backpack. Carefully placing the book inside the pack, he realizes how nicely it fits, almost as if it had spent quite a lot of time, right there in that pack.

Having gathered the emergency coins from the secret floorboard he had seen his mother use, he makes sure he has locked the doors and windows, and sets out for Polk Tower. He doesn't think about what he might now do with his life, he merely wonders how long it will take to become a powerful mage. He wonders not if, but when he would be able to say "I have come for you my father" to his face, after avenging his mother's death.

He wonders these things silently. Many would later say that everything he did, he did silently, and that was what made him such an unnerving opponent.

Below, in the town known as Valaria, which was just now bustling to life, an old man sleeps fitfully after a night of drink. His dreams are of dark wizards appearing in the night.

Chapter II - A New Beginning

Arriving at Polk Tower, the boy notices the abundance of life that surrounds the tower. Having traveled for many days, and not really knowing where he was, the boy seemed to somehow know that this was his destination.

The tower, seeming to rise up into the very heavens themselves, gives the appearance of luminescence. Being daylight however, the boy could not be sure. As the boy approaches the tower, he comes to realize that it is in fact no more than twenty feet in diameter. Walking around the tower, he also realizes that there are no doors, windows or openings of any kind to be found in the strange structure.

Silently circling the enigmatic tower, the boy cannot imagine how such a structure could come to be, let alone why. Pausing to ponder his situation, he starts to lean upon the wall, when startled, he pulls his hand back in dismay. His hand appears to have passed through the wall as if merely waving through a morning fog.

Gingerly, he puts his hand to the wall again and watches in amazement as once again, his hand moves into the wall as if it were not even there. Mustering courage, he decides he will step into the specter-like wall, never once considering that this can be no natural phenomenon.

After a moment of disorientation where all he could see was white, he burst forth into a large room. The room seemed to be a large comfortable library, consisting of shelves along the perimeter, a spiral staircase leading up, and a circular depressed center containing large soft leather furniture forming a circle around a large circular wooden table.

Slowly the boy took in his new surroundings, puzzled by the fact that the room was a full forty feet in diameter, whereas the tower outside seemed to be only twenty! And the walls that he just walked through with no effort, were now as strong as rock, in fact they appeared to be an odd sort of very smooth stone.

The boy wandered over the shelves filled with many apparently ancient texts, and discovered a small statue of what the boy believed to be a winged fairy. Awed by its beauty, he reached out to touch it, feeling drawn to it for some unknown reason.

"Lovely, isn't it?"

The boy jumped, startled to see a gray clad mage standing within the circle of furniture. He had heard no one approach, yet here this man stood, as if he had been there the whole time, watching.

Clasping his hands behind his back, the gray mage slowly walked around the furniture and up towards the boy. "It is a sprite. Very old but very powerful. I acquired it long ago on a trip to the Kandor mountains."

The Mage, now scant feet from the boy did not make the boy afraid, even with his drilling gaze, but instead the boy felt oddly calm in the mans presence.