

*The following is a short story based on a semi-recurring dream. The text herein falls under the license found at this address – <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/>. This is an original work by James Sumners (james@sumners.ath.cx).*

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## Their Curse

Great Wizard Arir'i brought us to such a land we had never dreamed of. We arrived in the middle of a verdant enclosure surrounded by a dense forest of immense, old, trees rising high in the sky. To our right, the field rolled into a slight hill. Above us, a sky of the clearest blue with faint wisps of clouds and a magnificent sun sitting high overhead. The beauty of the place was breathtaking; we had not dared to imagine such a land would await us when we entered Arir'i's portal.

The land is our curse.

We left Lænira, our home world, to escape death. The world was being ravaged by a never-ending war waged by wizards of indescribable power hurling magics at one another in contention for control of Lænira. Their power decimated the land and our people to the point that no one could understand what the wizards were vying for. Nothing was left for them to rule by the time Arir'i the Great decided that he had had enough. He came to our village with his companion – Valira – and told us that he could take us from Lænira to another world where we might once again know peace. We asked him why he would take us with him if he could indeed do such a thing. He confided that he did not know where his magic would take him; he knew only that he could open a portal to another world and that he and Valira did not wish to face whatever lay beyond alone.

Still leery of the wizard whose kind seemed determined to exterminate us, we asked him why he would choose us over some other village. It seems that he was born in

our village many generations prior; he said that he wanted to make amends to his own people and that is why he asked us to join him. Having nothing to loose we agreed to go with him. Five hours after the wizard entered our village we stepped on to the lush grass of a new world. Soon thereafter, children were playing games whilst their parents watched with a sense of wonderment and pleasure: pleasure that their children were once again playing; wonderment that Arir'i had not lied to them and actually delivered on his promise. I, too, was astounded by the beauty and serenity of the world and stood in the place where I had entered it for a long while just staring and trying to take it all in.

Something about the hill, though, tugged at the back of my mind. Arir'i also seemed to be drawn to it for he started to walk toward it; Valira trailing him. I, along with a small group of fellow villagers, followed him. I found myself leading the group right behind Valira. When we crested the hill we could see a fair sized lake being fed by a creek coming from the woods on the far side. In the distance to our left, just before the woods and next to the lake, we could see some sort of fountain. Following the wizard's lead we headed toward the fountain.

The fountain was built like those found in the square of an affluent city. Its round base was about ten feet in diameter with three concentric tiers rising above it. No, there was nothing unusual about the fountain except for its location and that which flowed through it. The fountain did not contain water: the fountain was filled with a liquid so black that it seemed to suck in the light and bury it beneath the dark surface. The liquid was so black and thick that I could not determine if it was actually flowing through the fountain or if my mind were only envisioning it moving.

When I managed to pull my gaze from the fountain and look past it I could see a small, faded yellow, two-story house, just inside the woods, in a low area that seemed to

be darker than the rest of the forest. Surrounding the house was a low stone wall with a plain wooden gate in the front center. It was then that I realized I had not heard any sounds other than the ones my people had been making. Here at the fountain I could not even hear those. It was as if the air itself were dead. A chill ran up my spine as I saw Arir'i turn from the fountain and start to walk toward the house. I shared a look with Valira; her eyes told me that we felt the same.

We followed Arir'i to the house.

When we arrived at the door Arir'i lightly touched it and the door swung silently open as if to beckon us inside. Arir'i looked over his shoulder at Valira and I; his eyes hinted at that feeling Valira and I silently admitted to at the fountain but would not reveal it completely. Slowly he stepped in to the house and we followed. Just inside the doorway, we found ourselves in a small foyer. To our left and right were large entryways to vacant rooms. The room to our left looked to be a common room for it had a fireplace; the room on our right could have easily been a library. It was lined with shelves along every wall from floor to ceiling with a center window in the far wall and the front wall. In front of us rose a staircase on the right and a hallway straight ahead. At the end of the hall, through a door, I could see a dimly lit window high on the wall above a counter. To the right of the doorway the hall turned right underneath the stairs.

Arir'i didn't even glance at the two side rooms or the staircase. Instead he started walking straight down the hall with Valira and I close in step. He did not continue through the door – he turned right. I could not see down the hall to the right. It was too... dark. What I could see, though, was Arir'i suddenly stop. I thought I saw his robes flutter as if a slight breeze was in the hall, yet I could not feel any movement of air. When he turned around his eyes could not hide the feeling as they did at the entrance to the house.

In fact, they exuded the feeling so intensely that my blood ran cold. I don't know how I heard her. Maybe it was the “dead air” that let her voice carry to my ears. I don't know. All I know is that I could hear Valira say, “Leave. We must leave. Now!” So I ran. I ran all the way to the fountain without looking back. I didn't need to look back because I could feel Valira and Arir'i close on my heels.

When we arrived at the fountain the whole village was there staring at the ground between it and the lake. They were watching the blackness from the fountain flow in to the lake and slowly spread across the water. I looked to the sky and saw that the sun was lower, much lower, than it had been when we started for the house. I still do not know how long we stood in that back hallway. I just know that when I turned back to Arir'i his face looked hollow and he was staring at the lake.

I couldn't look at the house.