

Witchcraft. The word nestles into my head, making space for itself where it is not welcome. I squeeze my eyes shut, in an attempt at forcing it out. It echoes, louder still. The great, cavernous chambers of my mind all seemingly empty except for this one, taunting word that has possessed me, taken over my brain as if it were nothing but space to be occupied, without regard toward other thoughts inside of it. My mind is betraying me. Now there is only this one, treacherous word in my mind. The door in front of me. And the memory of when it all began.

"Down the stairs. Corridor on the right- sorry, my mistake- left. Elevator as an alternative, although it is quite unreliable. Walk down on the left. Third door on the right. Witchcraft."

"Whatever do you mean, Lachlin? Surely there are guards?"

"Ah, these 'guards' are of myth and mist. No guard has the courage to stand in front of the door, for fear of what is behind it, my dear Encasgor. For fear... of what is behind it."

"Folly!"

"I fool you not. Surely in all our years of gambling, you know my tell?"

"A twitch of the left eyebrow."

"And should it be going about now?"

"I... the light is too dim to see."

"Or is the dimness of your own two eyes, Encasgor?"

"..."

This conversation has been haunting me for weeks now. The first time I found myself wondering about the truth in Lachlin's tale. The first time I found myself standing at this door, with nothing in my hands but a simple handkerchief- I'd had a cold that day. The second time, when I had discovered myself to be standing in front of the door again- closer, that time, a mere meter away, or so. And the third, this time. When I had come prepared to open it. In the satchel hanging at my side, I feel the weight of the small metal rod I had brought. I consider using it, should the door be locked. But, according to Lachlin, it is not.

I take a breath. I can do it now. Right now. No one is in sight; this is the perfect window and this opportunity may never present itself again. Breathe again.

My breath rattles throughout my skull, as if it knows I may never take another. This terrifies me. I begin to breathe again and again, assuring myself that this is something I am capable of. Once I've settled some, I realize that this could be the last thing I do. *Witchcraft.* To even ponder this concept is treason. To go actively searching for it is quite certainly condemning yourself to a most horrible, gruesome demise.

I think of how it must feel to be tortured out of your wits, with no idea of how you may die. I imagine the feeling of whips on your back, the pain they cause nothing in comparison to the holes torn in your heart. It would do that to you, would it not? The humiliation, the heartbreak of

knowing that the light will leave your eyes, that you will never gaze upon another sunrise, or hear another bird sing? The knowledge that everyone else will carry on, but you will not?

Why am I doing this?

Why am I curious?

Why is every voice in my head saying to me-
Witchcraft?

It is still here. It is still screaming at me its existence, no matter how much I tell it, yes, I hear you. And I do hear it.

I have not yet uttered the word aloud, and yet it is every part of me. It is the breath I breathe, the sound I hear, and everything I see. And yet I have never experienced it. And this is why I am here, I suppose.

I am sick. I have the virus of curiosity, a condition heir to that of being human. It is not to be desired; this is for certain. But it is not to be denied, either. For denial brought me nowhere, nowhere save for standing at this very door, the door hiding all the supposed *witchcraft*. The sickening word that sends me into a trance, compelling me to open it. A simple action of turning a doorknob, as I have done countless times in my life, and yet this time may determine my future. Or to be precise, it might destroy it. So why do I have the strong, possessive urge to throw the door open and risk my future in order to catch a glimpse of whatever may be concealing itself?

My hand trembles. I force tears back into my skull, not wanting to degrade myself further. I reach forward, shaking more and more by the second, a pounding in my ears and a wheezing sound escaping my mouth. In an instant, I am back on the street, making my way to this building. It comes back in a rush, a memory of merely hours ago. Hours that feel like decades.

Pounding footsteps. I stop at building 201, out of breath. Take in my surroundings. No one in sight.

What did Lachlin say?

“Down the stairs. Corridor on the right- sorry, my mistake- left. Elevator as an alternative, although it is quite unreliable. Walk down on the left. Third door on the right. Witchcraft.”
Witchcraft.

I breathe for a moment, stopped in front of this architectural masterpiece. No time to take in its glory. Move on, move quickly, do not wait for the right moment; there is no right moment.

Breathe.

I walk in the door, not sure what is to become of me if I ever walk out.

I am going in for the final time.

I can do it. Reach for the handle, turn the knob and be done with all of this curiosity. I would know what is beyond this plank of wood and wall. Or, on the contrary to that, I could leave. No one would ever know I was here, and if they were to find out somehow, they would have no proof of my intentions. I would be forever curious, but I would be safe and alive.

Choose. The word locks into place, almost as prominent as my other word. I must choose.

I take another breath, letting the word escape my lips, knowing that this is a risk I need to take.

For my sanity.

For my soul.

I turn to walk away.

And then I spin. And I turn the handle.

The End.