

**Nowhere's End**  
By Logan Deane

For Curtis, the lost king of Everywhere

Part 1

A Gathering

She was writing on her hands again. Less efficiently than usual, letting the ink feather into her skin, making words of the feelings; she blackened her palms. She had seen the man and he had leapt and vanished before her eyes at least 10 dozen times, until it hurt to look at him. She had spoken hasty words with him and now she was alone to think of them and remember how his eyes had eaten of her form, barely resting on her face. He was lucky she was used to such attentions.

She wrote:

"Such is darkness born of night  
To darken thus all holy light  
If the daughter would make right  
The daughter must then surely fight"

All lay still, and in the air no sounds but violins, and her hair like a fence to hold back her eyes. She had spoken to the Shifting Man and his guidance had been solitary, brittle, breakable. And yet, she knew, his words had been invaluable to her desperate cause. She stood, now, at the gate to Shifting Sands and now she closed it, allowing the cold copper from her fingers. She walked, now, back along the road to her own struggling land.

Her thin, blue dress billowed in the winds that always blow between such impossible places. Here and there stars flung themselves at her feet, begging to be caught and carried home with her, to safer places than their sky. She allowed them all

into her pockets, knowing any ally is better than no one, be they humble as a fallen star. She hummed the softest tune and her feet made gentle sounds upon the path, strung out in semi-precious stone like the bauble on some giant's throat. Her fingers, eyes, nose, lips and ears were delicate as paper, and her skin as pale. Her hair hung down in winding curls, some gold, some auburn brown. She moved as a princess, for so she was. The Princess Of Nowhere.

The wind came in torrents like waves of freezing water, but she did not shiver. She was warm with a light her own, for her land was a place of survival, no matter whom the enemy. Nowhere must remain always or Somewhere would break down as well, and Anywhere would surely fall apart. Everywhere was nothing without the others—they fed it, gave it life and hope and breath. Nowhere could not die. This was her belief. *But why then must I fight?* The words were echoes of the dreams, prophecies perhaps, that she had seen for many nights and that had woken all her solitary realm.

'Fight' meant there was something to fight for—something to lose. She walked on and now she shivered only just a little. She began to notice the stars in her pockets were crying out dirges—funeral songs she'd forgotten or only half remembered from when Nowhere had been a place of many,

many mourning ones. She bit her lip. She walked slower now and she realized she could not fight this on her own.

Once home, she lit herself a fire of the stars she had collected, who cried out in complaint that such as they be wasted so carelessly. She reminded them of who she was and their mouths no longer spoke as they warmed her with their bodies. There was a breathlessness here, a waiting endlessly for things to happen. Nowhere was a quiet place-it's brutality in it's lack of landscape and it's lack of usefulness. There was only she, The Well, and her dome of Stately Mirrors. The fallen stars fizzed and popped and slowly their light left them and their soft bodies burned to powder to be taken by the winds.

She found paper and a ball-point pen and with her fragile, perfect hands she drew the faces of the ones she could remember. It was difficult sometimes, remembering all those things that had once been and were not anymore. Sometimes the easiest things are the most difficult to do and so it was with memories of love that once had been and was no more. Even so, she drew the hard lines of his face and the soft lines of his name amongst the rest. Perhaps he would still care for her enough to rescue her when she was most alone.

The Flying Boy. The Small Dead Girl. The Willow King. Her fingers bent the pen against the paper, making whisper sounds and lion's breath. The Prisoner. She drew him with a scowl. Old Pantomime. It was all rounded corners under the

black glare of the pen. The Dreaded Scars. They were difficult to make on paper, no matter the skill of the artist's wrists or the taper of her fingernails. The Dreaded Scars were never meant to be portrayed in such a way.

Her list complete, The Princess of Nowhere brushed her hair until it was soft and straight as silk, pulled a drink from The Well Of Tears, drank deeply, solemnly (as one must always drink from The Well Of Tears) and, as seasons grew and died and Summer wound it's vines all 'round Nowhere, she slept.



The princess woke with breathlessness. Emotions do not dream, and places only gently. The Princess of Nowhere was both those things and more and yet it had been long nights since she'd closed her eyes to anything but darkness. Tonight she had seen her little brother, The Sovereign of Somewhere, and he had spoken to her with his supple voice and she had listened, as always, with impatience. When she first had seen him, sanguine there on the dusty planks of some forgotten attic, he had been reciting from a list of words:

"Expectorate, Aqueous, Snapdragon, Xenophile, Shiver, Adumbrate..." He had seen her then, lifted his domed head, tilted his shaped and pampered eyebrows in a joking way, and slid his slender lips to make an uncomfortable smile.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"I must use these words and then all of the friendly men will then know I am smarter than the way my voice makes me." He was proud as he spoke, and yet his head hung at an angle that reminded her of the way a dog looks with it's tail between it's legs.

"Why don't you use them when you speak with me?" She asked, gently. They had never spent much time together, as was the obligation of their office. This brother of hers, a king in his own, was no different than the penitent few who passed through her gate, often on their way to him.

He giggled for a moment, a child's sound, and just as quickly he was standing and his mouth was straight and small. "I do not surely know the very meaning of the words, or of their worth, dear sister."

"Does it matter to the friendly men, brother, what the words mean?" She had asked him then.

"Most surely it is just that I do say them, sister, and with an intricate voice as well."

"Do they know the meanings, brother?"

"No." He frowned and she knew, then, that she had ruined his fun, taken his usefulness.

"Learn them, brother, and you are better than those men and they look upon you with jealousy."

He smiled, just a little, and his voice changed to a toneless drone. "Most surely, sister, it is now definitely time for you, sister, to leave Nowhere and to mass an army there to hope to save what you may of your land from the most terrifying thing."

"What 'most terrifying thing'?" She had begun to ask, and then all had been black and emptiness. And so she had woken, breathless and uncomfortable. She packed her mirror, 17 small red and orange gummy bears, a rock that spoke in poems, and her flask of water from the Well. As she left, she passed a pale young man and woman, arms entwined like snakes, and told them they would

have to walk the paths of Nowhere all alone for now and that she would come and find them when she finished. Their faces were thin and pretty, with a lackluster confidence and self-preparation in the way their mouths hung. She smelled kisses on their lips when they mumbled soft ‘thank-you’s and wished her luck on her journey. It was cold beyond the gate.

She arrived gently, her naked feet murmuring a weak slap against the cobblestone. She paused a moment to fuss with the wrinkles, though little more than creases, in the pale vinegar tinge of her gown. There was nothing for the body to experience here, save for the feel of cobblestone and the tender scent of Coriander. In measured breath, she filled herself with that heavy air, lowered herself to her knees, dropped her head and outstretched her thin arms in a supplicating bend.

With the hush of soft breeze through Autumn's sallow branches, the space around and beneath her filled. The Princess of Nowhere stood, eyes as yet unopened for fear of punishment unaccounted. So it was, gown awash in the gentle motion of this new air, toes tickling at the soft-packed earth, eyes tightly shut, that she waited. This was the structure of her visits here, as it had always been. And yet, by now, the Willow King had always breathed his wheezing chuckle and accepted her into his home.

Today, the only resonance that moved except the wind was a sharp, slow, pitiable moan. She waited still for several minutes. In her mind she puzzled at the words that she should speak. Finally, she spoke in gentle tones, her eyebrows furrowed and hands worrying at her gown.

“My lord, is it bad that I am here?”

There was silence for a moment, she still

wishing for the right words to speak, and a sound of effort spent in straightening a crooked frame. “My dear, there is no better time for you than now. Enter, please, but expect no hospitality, for I am nothing but a beggar anymore.”

Eyes opened to pale grasses souging in an Autumn breeze. Before her stood an old and wrinkled man, the deep scarlet of his kingly robes now smudged with grass and dust, creased and furrowed in a way that reminded her of the tired lines of his face. His crown of gold and diamond lusterless, cocked, cobwebbed and forgotten.

Again, her tongue hung useless in her mouth for words to speak. “My lord... what’s happened here?”

There was a resignation in the shape his shoulders slumped. His eyes still wept in gentle streams across his mountain cheeks. “You have not seen the worst of it, my dear.” One fat and gnarled finger pointed past her worried face. “Look!”

Behind her, in a pool of fallen leaves, it’s branches thin as hair and motionless among the swaying grasses, was his Willow. Half of it lay in a tumble on the soil, the other half now stark and dying.

The seat of his throne (which the Willow had been) had been shattered in the fall; it’s base still in place, its back and arms twisted in the mass on the ground.

“Do you see, now, what has ruined me? Do you see I mourn my throne and so my kingship? For years I had this place and these,” he brought his hands down to caress the shivering grass, “my faithful subjects. This place was all of me.”

The Princess of Nowhere waited in that almost-cold, trying but not knowing what it was the old king meant. “My lord, you still have your faithful subjects. The tall grasses remain.”

The Willow King snorted, and shook his pallid head. “I am not your lord and neither theirs. Years I spent atop my throne and when I wished for my subjects to dance, they would move in such formations in the breeze! When I wished to hear their words they spoke to me in whispered voices. Now, devoid of that most important of all aspects of this place, I am no king.”

“But, my lord, you still keep your kingly crown...”

He smiled on her, then, and took her hand. His skin was soft and cold and he shook a little when he spoke. “Crowns are only baubles, keepsakes worn by aging kings to hide their growing frailty.”

He chuckled, and the sound spun ‘round like Autumn leaves to die upon the careless earth. “No. I am no king. I cannot rule over anyone. My throne is dead and I have mourned it’s passing long enough. I think that soon I shall travel to the gates

of *your* far realm, my dear, to beg entrance from *you*. I hope I won't be too much trouble for you, dear."

Taken aback, the Princess stammered. "My lord, you need not come. I had come to ask your help, though I had not wanted it like this. My home will be in danger, lord, and I would fear for your protection."

He shook his wearied head, his crown tumbling to the dust at his feet. "I must. There is no other place for me. I will say what goodbyes I can and will journey there tomorrow. Leave me with my people now, my dear."

Wordless, she bowed deeply to the once-king and took her leave from him. Outside, in the nothingness, she shook her head and wrung her delicate hands. Whatever was to damage Nowhere had felled a tree and killed a king. Where was it next to go?

Again she walked the placelessness, hands clutching at the void. There were lights here that whirred like tape recorders and made shapes that looked like words that said 'forget everything and stay a while'. She shook her head at these and carried on, though the air became thick as she moved toward her purpose.

Breathing softly, the pale Princess made her way towards the Palace of The Prisoner.



In this world in which you make your life, there are those who are not near as plain as looks prescribe. Nor are their situations quite so average as your own, assuming you, dear reader, are not one of them yourself. It was this way with The Prisoner.

The Princess of Nowhere always felt small chills when visiting this place, for it is never proper to walk within the places that define you, as you may already be aware. And so it was with apprehension that she found herself outside the steel door of cell 17 within the Southern Island Penitentiary.

The door stood open, The Prisoner within, his undersized frame misshapen by the folds of his own royal attire. A scowl hung ever over the faded orange jumpsuit, eyes always holding looks of shame and angst.

Letting herself in (for his door does not have locks) The Princess kept her eyes a little higher than his face.

“So, you still won’t look at me. As if your sins are any less than what I am!” He spoke with his accusing tone, his voice a unity of scorn.

“This is the way the rules dictate, Prisoner.” She spoke without emotion, as was proper in this place.

“And so it ought to be. So it will always be. So it has always been.” He spoke in sing-song fashion, mocking her, his thin lips curled. “I know

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