

## The Last Mile Messenger

Tortured by familiarity and tired of chewing on the same bland grief-stricken words I longed for a new taste, even if that taste comes from the cursed lips of the mouth of madness. Like many aspiring writers I've seen hope, known hope, and had it let me down. The occasional anthology inclusion doesn't pay the bills, fill my cup, or help me remember things differently. So, I considered an arrangement - one I suspect was offered to other desperate writers before me.

The conditions of my pact prevent me from disclosing its exact origin or the holder of said arrangement. The latter of which I did not know at the time, although I now suspect that clever fraudster's identity. What I can say is that I am his messenger boy. I had a great pain removed. I don't remember its cause, but the price paid was my servitude. The pact carved it out rough and carelessly, leaving only scar tissue, suggestions, and a pain-shaped void. Why do I still set coffee for two and hear another voice as I proofread?

While the supernatural can carry messages over great time & distances, they often like to leave the last mile of delivery to fate and human hand. I have no power to change any outcomes. History will still run its course. A young boy in Nantucket will still perish at sea to the stomach of his crewmen. There will be no shelter from the storm, only my name beside stories drawn from the letters I carry. Sometimes the letters are beautiful beacons of hope, the arcane postal service isn't all despair & foreboding, but you write what you know, even if you can't place it.

I sat below the magnolia tree by the Old Stone House considering the history of the location I'd been beckoned to today. A man at the nearest corner store told me this morning of ghost horses of Richmond that leave behind corporeal scat. He hasn't seen the horses, but is a firm believer. I hoped he was wrong as I saw a red insignia poking through the wet autumn leaves on the sidewalk and wiped an unknown grime from the weathered wove stationery. It bore the address 508 E Franklin and the initials WK.

When I arrived at 508 later that night after my evening shift I found its door cracked open. The building's elevator dinged as I arrived, but no one entered or exited so I boarded it myself. Between this and a collection of other odd jobs, I'm accustomed to the late night callings and walking amongst the city of rats. When an elevator arrives, you get in. The same strange electromagnetic impulses that keep me from walking into traffic usher me into these situations, their mysterious motivations inhuman, but also outside my pact.

The elevator plummeted fast, its door never closing. When it stopped, I felt as if I had arrived at a most curious subterranean cavernous gallery. I peered forth curiously at a massive draped canvas. Those who enter pacts to open timeless letters for others' eyes are the same who'd look behind the curtain in an otherworldly basement and so I did. The story must be told. Behind that curtain was a gaping and fiery beast bearing its wet pearly whites. I'd heard rumors about the Hotel Greene's famed hellmouth, but nothing like what happened next. It bit me as it swallowed the letter whole, caressing my hand with its muscular bleeding tongue. I haven't been able to stop writing since. This is the start of the story I'm supposed to tell.