

Outside it's thundering hard. And the rain is heavy.

The old is rusting and the new is sparking out. One of those nights when you're happy to be locked inside.

I'm currently boarding at #7's country estate. And wow - this place is amazing. 32 bedrooms, six drawing rooms, a home cinema, operating theatre, supermarket, simulation chamber and more. Not to be outdone, the grounds were even more lavish and intriguing. A moat, hedgerow mazes, and an ancient stretch of sinking sand between the grand entrance and the nearby cliffs, 'to keep out the ghouls', he joked to me as I arrived. Like I said, amazing place.

What's more amazing is to think that I was one second away from fatally shooting him this time last week. Twice.

How did I go from his assassin to his house-guest in such a short time? Sure beats me. After the ruckus in the attic, the four of us - #7, #147, #292 and I - ended up enjoying a wild night at Lumps World Fashion Week. It was so much fun I almost forgot all about rapture. Almost.

Since then there's been a strange truce between us all. #147 was sent to a nearby medical facility to have his leg patched up and #292 has been spending long evenings in #7's personal study here at the mansion - lights dimmed and heavy smoke billowing from her chimney. And me, well I've sort of been left to my own devices. I've got my own room, bathroom and butler. A mohawk. Funnily enough, when I asked his number, he responded with a name; Rupert Barrington-Brown. Or "B.B." as he asked to be known. Funny, I thought, I haven't heard of a name in a while.

He's a posh old Lump, though, quite funny in his ways. Gold teeth and a red uniform, like a guard or something. "B.B." I said, pleased to meet you.

It might be fancy here, but I'm not done asking questions about the Rapture.

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I was gazing out my window earlier, admiring the storm and the destructive power of the weather in Lumps World, when I saw B.B. He was stood hundreds of yards from the house, completely still. I could only just make him out as a tiny, unguarded candle illuminated his face from his cupped hands.

A candle!? In that wind and rain!? What was he thinking?

I looked at my warm fire and copy of the Lumps World Observer, ready for a cup of warm tea and bed, I was.

But - sheesh, there was almost no visibility in the storm. If that candle blows out, I thought, he's done for.

With no regard for my own safety, I grabbed my torch and bolted down the stairs.

Catching my reflection in the mirror, I saw the figure of a Lump on a chair behind me, reading a paper, must have been one of the other staff,

"Call for help!" I yelled, "B.B's wandered into the night!" But I got no answer.

No time to wait for that selfish bastard, I thought.

As I rounded the stairs, I slipped on a loose rug and had to grip onto an expensive vase for balance - including the flowers therein. Continuing down the stairs, I noticed a thorn had pierced my skin, and I was bleeding a little.

Pressing on, I headed for the main entrance and into the night.

It was whipping rain outside. Ice rain. B.B's candle had disappeared and all I could do was press on, towards the sinking sand.

I'll have to watch my step, I thought.

Just then I heard a galloping sound and, to my disbelief, round the corner came a Horse-drawn carriage, with a flamboyant, young-looking Lump driving it. "Name's Shelby," he said.

What was with all these names?

"B.B is out here, near the cliffs, he's not safe!" I exclaimed.

"Ha! IS he now?" The kid said, whipping the reins, "well you better hop on with me, you won't make it over quicksand on foot. I'll take you to the bridge."

I jumped on. The oddly fellow gestured me in close and the carriage took off.

It was a bumpy and difficult ride and we were often close to losing our balance. As we got close to the bridge, in fact, we began to veer off course completely and I feared for our safety.

"Pull her in close, for Slime Ear's sake!" I pleaded. But when I looked to my left.. The driver was gone. Had he fallen off? If so he fell without a scream. There was no sign of him to the left or right - and we were headed for the quick sand.

Though I tried to steady the reins, it was no use. The carriage was tumbling over.

Ceeeeerrraassshhhhhhhhhhh. A bruised chin and a mouthful of sand were the least of my concerns. My legs were sinking in. I scabbled with my arms to latch on to something more solid than the perilous sand... until, bizarrely, I realised that the sand I was grabbing was not soft at all, it was rock hard, like concrete. And yet I was sinking into it. It made no sense.

I was now waist deep in thick concrete.

Before my armpits were submerged I managed to strike a match - and it was then I saw them. Only for a second.

The ghouls.

It was not sand dragging me deep into the bowels of the ancient grounds, but skeletal hands and translucent claws. Pulling me into a deathly darkness. And as the blackness intensified, I heard laughter. Was it #7? Was it #292? Hard to tell.

But, out of the darkness, I saw a face.

B.B.

The old butler emerged from the maze and was wading into the thick, rock hard ground just as I had done, holding his undisturbed candle just below his face. Laughing. Cackling. The wound in my hand was throbbing. It seemed to be getting worse with every heartbeat.

The ghouls licked at my feet. My mouth and nose were now submerged in a heavy gloop of black tar. The concrete was liquifying. Where was I heading?

B.B. drew closer. We were both submerged now in an all consuming hellscape, yet his candle remained lit. His nose touched mine and his eyes thinned. Two red sapphires, glowing with emptiness.

I screamed but made no sound. Instead my mouth filled up with black sand and I lost what was left of my breathe.

B.B. opened his mouth to talk, his gold teeth falling out of his mouth, one by one.

"Voodoo." He whispered.

Suddenly the back of my shirt is gripped and I'm hoisted up. Sand falls from my mouth and clothes. A strong arm holds my entire weight and drops me into the back of a robo-spider vehicle. Brand new. Top of the range.

The ran has died down and #7 has come looking for me. He even waded into the sand wearing his waterproof boots.

"What on earth are you doing? You wanna get yourself killed?" He yelled, powering up the spider.

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Back inside and I'm drinking warm tea in the main entrance hall. #7 is dusting off his clothes.

"You were out looking for who?" He asked angrily.

"B.B." I whispered.

"Who?"

"My butler."

"What butler?"

"My butler."

"You have a butler?"

"No, the house butler. The butler you organised for me." #7 looked confused. So I continued, "The butler who has been waking me up each morning! Bringing me tea and the morning newspaper."

"I may be rich, old chap," #7 laughed, "but I certainly don't have any butlers. There haven't been butlers at this estate for hundreds of years."

I could hardly respond.

"What's this,?" #7 asked, pointing to a red handprint on the back of his front door.

"Oh," I begun, "I cut my hand earlier on the rose bush. Apologies, I must have bled a little on the door."

I held my hand out to show #7 the damage.

"Looks fine to me." He said, disapprovingly. "Think you ought to get to bed."

As I looked down at my hand, the wound was gone.

"Alright, I'm off to my quarters. No more silly buggers now, yes?"

"But the butler--"

"No more about any butlers!" #7 stopped me. "Alright?"

"Uhh- yes." I managed.

"Right."

He marched off.

After a few moments in silence, I slowly made my way up the very stairs I had - or believed I had - tumbled down earlier in pursuit of a butler who... did... n't... exist? It felt so strange to say.

B.B. My old mate. I'd known him for 5 days. Was that not him I saw out in the fields?

Had I been making my own tea?

Did I have any proof of him?

Hm. Perhaps I made him up after all, I thought. All this talk of

Rapture, these other dimensions. This coming and going between the past and the future. All this nonsense about #7 and his evil scheme. Why, it's sent me absolutely loopy. I'm dreaming up ghosts and all sorts.

I had a funny turn and ended up in some quick sand. #7 had to rescue me. Awfully embarrassing. Nothing more.

As I arrived outside my room, I slumped down in a hallway chair. Feeling better. There was a copy of the Lumps World Observer on a side table. At last, I thought. Let's forget all about that nonsense and just read the news.

The doors all closed shut. The light's all but off. The house was silent. I almost felt at peace.

Until suddenly, my bedroom door swung open from the inside with a crash! I froze still. Out of the doorframe ran a panicked figure, who clocked me in the hallway mirror, but continued.

"Call for help!" He yelled over his shoulder, "B.B's wandered into the night." Then he ran off, briefly slipping on a loose bit of rug and steadying himself on a vase of flowers.

I couldn't see the face, but I knew the voice immediately.

It was mine.