

House of MYSTERY

VERTIGO



Matthew
STURGES
Werther
DELL'EDERA
Carine
BRANCOWITZ
José
MARZÁN, JR.

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THE SUMMERLANDS.

You are more powerful than you suspect, even in your wildest fantasies.

I TOOK A **GAMBLE** BRINGING YOU TO THIS PLACE, MS. KEEBLE.

I BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN DO A THING HERE YOU MIGHT NOT **EASILY** DO ELSEWHERE.

You are the story you tell yourself, but that is not all you are capable of being.

That story can change.

I DIDN'T COME ALL THE WAY FROM STUFFYTOWN FOR THIS!

FIG, WE NEED TO GO!

You have in you a mad and mighty genius, a king and a queen, a virtuoso.

You contain within your skin glory and light and might beyond imagining.

All you need is the right moment to bring it out of you.

YOU SAY ANOTHER WORD AND I'LL TEAR OUT YOUR STUFFING, RABBIT-BOY!

**monsters / the goblin king / baby universes /
problem solved / the fix / what you need vs.
what you want / three guys walk into a bar**

**Safe as
Houses
Part 5
of 5**

**Matthew
Sturges:**
writer

**Werther
Dell'Edera:**
pencils

**José
Marzán, Jr.:**
inks

**Todd
Klein:**
letters

**Lee
Loughridge:**
colors

**Esao
Andrews:**
cover

**Angela
Rulino:**
editor

The right moment, like a big monster attacking you, maybe.

YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR PLUSH RABBIT CAME FROM?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT **POWER** GAVE HIM LIFE?

IT WAS YOU. YOU CAN LIKEWISE DREAM A DEATH FOR YONDER BEAST.

I CAN'T DO THAT, YOU CRAZY BITCH.

I CAN'T WHIP UP MONSTER-KILLING BUNNIES OUT OF THIN AIR.

OH, BUT YOU CAN. WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD YOU DREAMT ENTIRE **WORLDS** INTO BEING!

YEAH, BUT... THEY WERE REALLY **DUMB** WORLDS THAT DIDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

AND APPARENTLY THEY FALL APART.

WHATEVER YOU CREATE NEED BE NEITHER **SENSIBLE** NOR **PERMANENT**.

ONLY DO IT, OR WE SHALL ALL DIE!

Faaaaa-
aaaaak!

JUST LIKE, USE YOUR **IMAGINATION** OR SOMETHING!

OH, RIGHT. LIKE **THAT** EVER WORKS, DAPHNE.

NEARBY

THIS IS A TIME
FOR ATTACKING AND
DYING!

THIS IS
A TIME FOR GREAT
HONOR AND MUCH
BLOOD!

I DO NOT
AGREE.

THIS IS A TIME
TO BE GLY AND CUNNING.
THIS IS A TIME TO BE **CAREFUL**.
THE THINKING MAN WILL NOT
EXPECT IT FROM US.

LISTEN TO
HIM! HE IS A **GAY**
COWARD!

HE KNOWS
NOTHING OF FIGHTING
OR OF BEING STRONG! DO
YOU ALL AGREE?

NO ONE
WILL SAY IT, BUT YOU
ARE **NOT** A GOOD
LEADER, KARS.

YOU ARE
STRONG AND YOU
ARE BRAVE, BUT
YOU ARE NOT
WISE.

STEP
DOWN NOW,
TURSIS, AND I
WILL LET YOU
LIVE.

I
CANNOT STEP
DOWN.
I WILL NO
LONGER REMAIN
QUIET ABOUT WHAT
I **KNOW** TO BE
TRUE.

**SO
BE
IT!**



HURRY UP! IT'S COMING!

I NEED TIME! I'M THINKING!

WE DO NOT HAVE TIME!

OPEN THE DOOR BEHIND YOU AND FIND ANOTHER WORLD BEHIND IT!

I did this.

The Cloud Kingdom.
The Clown Kingdom.
Stuffytown.

I made them because
I didn't know I couldn't.



JUST OPEN IT! JUST OPEN IT! ALREADY, DAMMIT!

RRRR-RRRRK!



KREEEK













HYA!

YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND AT ALL.

IT TAKES GREAT STRENGTH TO BE GAY IN THIS WORLD.



KARG IS DEAD! I AM LEADER NOW!

WHO WILL GAIN SAY IT?



TURSIS IS LEADER!

NO!

I SAY, TURSIS IS KING!

WE ARE GOBLINS, AND TURSIS IS OUR KING!




IF WE BE GOBLINS, THEN LET US FIGHT!

I WILL TELL YOU HOW IT WILL GO!









With the Thinking Man imprisoned and Tursig leading the Goblin charge, the war was over in a matter of minutes.



Daphne reluctantly took the throne, and by all accounts reigned wisely and fairly until the end of her days.

She never shed a tear for her mother.



The Thinking Man met an inglorious end, and so far as I know, not a single soul grieved his passing.



Tursig was officially crowned king upon his return to the Goblin Market.

His reign was far more troubled than Daphne's, but his legend was also far greater.



I went with Walden to Stuffytown, a journey that's a story unto itself, but when we finally arrived, it was too late.



Even if I'd known how to fix things, there was no one left to fix it for.



You have within yourself the power to do anything, it's true.

But everyone else has the same power. And some of them want to hurt you.



You want to use all that power to keep yourself safe. "Safe as houses," as they say.

But in my experience, houses aren't all that safe.

I believe that your name in large part determines who you are. If your name is Timothy, it means you're probably very tidy. If your middle name is Wayne, it means you are probably a serial killer. If your name is Nancy, it means you are kindly and bland. And if your name is Lotus Blossom Mackenzie, as mine is, it means you will die a virgin.

Now I came to have my name is this: my parents publish a magazine that extols the virtues of hemp. That tells you everything you need to know about them; let us never speak of it again.

Some quick facts about me. My habitat: Costa Buena, California. My current predicament: High School. My grade: sophomore. The number of friends that I have: zero. I blame my lack of friends on the low quality of public education. A more enlightened system would give me the attention that I deserve. It would also base my grades on the content of my mind, not the quality of my assignments.

The attention intended for me has, erroneously, been lavished on a girl named Heather Webb. If your name is Heather it generally means that you are an evil bitch who deserves to die. So why is Heather popular and not me? This is one of the great unanswered questions in life. It may have something to do with her breasts. In addition to her breasts (perhaps, one assumes, because of them), Heather also has Austin Porter.

I am not in love with Austin Porter. I have no interest whatsoever in seeing him shirtless, running my fingers through his wavy hair, or biting his shoulder. These rumors are utter fabrications and should be summarily ignored. Though I will add without comment that if your name is Austin, it means that you are a Greek god with piercing blue eyes.

Now I am in Algebra class. Algebra is an excellent metaphor for life in that it is both pointless and uninteresting, and in that I am unsuccessful at it. At the end of life you don't die, you simply solve for x . I am sitting in Algebra class, back straight, pen out, doodling in the margin of my notebook. Around me are not other teenagers, but little squirrels. Little chattering squirrels with cell phones in their little hands, texting as though their lives depend on it. Text text text. Their tiny minds are so empty; I have no idea what they could possibly have to text about so much. Today the squirrels are texting even more than normal. I can hear the pit-tit-tit of fingers scrabbling over tiny keyboards from every direction.

My own cell phone surprises me by making the tiny bleepy noise it presumably makes when I receive a text.

I reach slowly into my purse, as though reading a text is the most natural thing on earth for me. A brief fantasy in which I have received a clever and amorous message from Austin Porter plays out in feverish double time in my mind, spinning off in several unspeakable variations before my hand closes on the phone. I pick up the phone. I open it. Time stops. It's a photo of me.

Well, sort of. The image has clearly been Photoshopped within an inch of its life. It contains a number of clear factual errors. For one thing, the girl has a tattoo on her neck, which I clearly do not have. She also has breasts, which I very clearly do not have. Trust me when I say there is nothing going on down there. If I could swap my grade average for my cup size, half of my problems would be solved. There is also a horse in the image. Let us walk no further down that road.

I close my phone and replace it in my purse, the epitome of poise. I try to look straight ahead, but some kind of malignant magnetism drags my gaze backward, over my classmates, all of whom are either looking at me or pretending not to. It grows hot, here in the place where Algebra is done. The skin on my face is prickling. My eyes find their target in the back row. Heather Webb is smiling at me. She blows me a kiss. Next to her, Austin Porter is shrugging at me, suppressing a smile.



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I ♥ U CLARA

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Heather mouths the words, "It sucks to be you." I deeply want to solve Heather Webb for x.

That evening I walk out to the beach, where my grandfather lives in an old R.V. At 1967 Winnebago F-13 motor home, to be precise. My grandfather, Moack, is perversely proud of it. It has green shag carpet and matching vinyl interior. It smells musty. The cabinets are full of strange, wonderful, secret things. I see it.

Moack, I should mention, is a sorcerer. He's not the robe-wearing, pointy-hat kind. He says these guys are pretentious dickheads, and who can argue. When I poke my head in the Winnebago, Moack's wearing Bermuda shorts, a wife-beater, and a simple cap that reads **FUCK R.E.P.O.G.N.**

"What's the word, bird?" says Moack, after releasing a hit from the largest bong that has surely ever been created by mankind.

"I need a spell," I say. "A spell that will murder everyone in my entire school in hideous, graphic, and painful ways that I will describe for you now."

Moack smiles in a kindly, grandfatherly way. "Something happen at school?"

I relay the events of the day, using any number of choice expletives, any of which would earn me an hour of mandatory meditation at home.

"Shit," says Moack, after a moment. "That Heather girl sounds like a real piece of work."

"She's just so fucking perfect," I say. "Everyone thinks she hung the moon."

"Man," says Moack. "I know the guy that hung the moon. His name is Steve."

He takes a meditative bong hit, then jumps up. "I know!" he says. He starts rummaging through his cabinets, fazing down foul-smelling ingredients on the tiny kitchenette counter. You ever see that movie *Freaky Friday*? With Barbara Harris? Man, that woman was a hot piece of ass.

"You want me to change bodies with my mother? Are you trying to get me to commit suicide?"

"Not your mom," he says. "This Heather Webb girl." He finds a mortar and pestle and starts grinding his ingredients with a vengeance. "You spend a day in her body, she spends a day in yours, and then you switch back and you've both learned a valuable lesson and all that happy crap."

He pauses. "That's a good idea, right? I don't just think it's a good idea because I'm baked?"

"Which," I say. "How does one go about doing such a thing?"

"Names," he says. "You just fill the true names off and switch 'em around a little."

"Here," says Moack, once he's done. He hands me a little clay pot, full of some of the foulest-smelling shit you've ever encountered. "You get Heather Webb's true name, put it in here, and then go to sleep. When you wake up, you'll be switched. Then, twenty-four hours later, you smash the pot."

I reach for it, but he snatches it back. "No more than twenty-four hours, though," he says. "If you wait any longer than that, you'll start to forget you've you."

I take the pot and sniff it. "How do I get Heather's true name?" I say.

"Oh," says Moack. "For that you're going to need one more little ingredient."

The one more ingredient turns out to be one that only Heather Webb can provide.

It takes me two days to get it. It's a body fluid, and not the good one. Get over it. The spell finally ready, I call my mother into my room before bed in order to prime the pump.

"What's wrong, little flower?" says Mom. My mom **ROARS** like patchouli smells.

"It's Heather Webb," I say, fighting back alligator tears. "This girl from school. I can't stop thinking about her. Sometimes I want to be her so badly I can't stand it."

My mom's head almost explodes at the opportunity to give me some sound advice that I ignore. When she's done babbling I tell her that I'm tired and want to go to bed early. She kisses my forehead and finally gets the hell out of my room.

Once I'm sure she's gone and isn't coming back, I take the magic pot (which I have sealed in a trash bag) from under my bed and climb out my window. I walk to Heather Webb's house and peek in her bedroom window. She's there, brushing her hair, her expression blank. I watch her for longer than is healthy, and then when she turns out her light, I leave. I walk through the grabby cold air to the marina and hurl the pot into the ocean. Then I go home and get in bed, to wait. Sleep is dreamless.



$$\begin{aligned} \sqrt{x+4} &= -2 + \sqrt{5x} \\ (\sqrt{x+4})^2 &= (-2 + \sqrt{5x})^2 \\ x+4 &= 4 - 4\sqrt{5x} + 5x \\ -3x - 4 &= -4\sqrt{5x} \\ -2x &= -4\sqrt{5x} \\ -\frac{2x}{-2} &= \frac{-4\sqrt{5x}}{-2} \\ (x)^2 &= (2\sqrt{5x})^2 \\ 4 \cdot 1x &= 4 \cdot 1x \\ 1x &= 0 \\) &= 0 \\ |2 &= \sqrt{5x} = -2 \\ 4 &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} (x-6)(x+8) &= (x-2)(x+5) \\ (x-4)(x-2) &= (x-5)(x-4) \\ x-4 &= x-2 \quad x=5 \quad x= \end{aligned}$$
$$4. \frac{x^2+1}{x} - \frac{20x}{x^2+1}$$
$$let u = x^2+1$$
$$u(u) = x^2+1$$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x} \right) &= -\frac{1}{x^2} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^2} \right) &= -\frac{2}{x^3} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^3} \right) &= -\frac{3}{x^4} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^4} \right) &= -\frac{4}{x^5} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^5} \right) &= -\frac{5}{x^6} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^6} \right) &= -\frac{6}{x^7} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^7} \right) &= -\frac{7}{x^8} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^8} \right) &= -\frac{8}{x^9} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^9} \right) &= -\frac{9}{x^{10}} \\ \frac{d}{dx} \left(\frac{1}{x^{10}} \right) &= -\frac{10}{x^{11}} \end{aligned}$$

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When I open my eyes my first thought is that I've fallen asleep with my contacts in, but the truth is that Heather Webb has perfect vision to go along with her perfect breasts. I pop out of bed and stand at Heather's (my) vanity mirror. Yup, I'm her all right. I'm pretty and normal. There's something in my eyes, though, that Heather doesn't have. A sharpness. No amount of squinting or deep breathing will make it go away.

Now I am Heather Webb. Now I have breasts, and friends, and Austin Porter.

While I am pondering the implications of this, my new cell phone rings. It's Chyenne Hamish. If your name is Chyenne, it means you're a rapid blonde girl who never stops chewing gum.

"Oh my God," says Chyenne. "I was just walking past Lotus Blossom Moackenzie's house and there was a total scene."

"A scene?" I say, shocking myself with my new voice.

"I swear to fucking god they were dragging her out of her house on a stretcher. She was SCREAMING. It was some shit."

The appropriate Heather Webb response to that? "What a drama queen," I deadpan.

Violent waves of Schadenfreude and satisfaction pulse through me. My mom, losing her shit. Heather, losing her shit. Everyone losing their collective shit over at my old house, and me at my new house laughing it up with good ol' Chyenne Hamish.

The doorbell rings. I end Chyenne and trot to the door, noting that I'm alone in the house, which is good because I have no interest in encountering either of the elder Webbs. It's Austin, looking at me with lust in his eyes. I sense that he is interested in more than walking me to school. I am very okay with this. His tongue is already halfway down my throat before I realize the cataclysmic depths of the error I have made. This is my first kiss, but it isn't his. It isn't even his first kiss with me. It's not romantic, or even sexy. It's lewd. I want him far away. But the kissing is better than when the kissing stops because I realize I have no idea what to say to Austin Porter, or what he expects of me. I don't know him at all.

He, however, either doesn't notice or doesn't care, because we walk to school together without him batting an eye. He walks me all the way to my first period classroom and grabs my ass on the way out.

Everyone looks at Heather Webb. Nobody ever looked at Lotus Blossom Moackenzie. It's creepy. What's even creepier is how easy it is to become Heather Webb. Over the past few days I have studied her schedule, the way she walks and talks. I fall right into her rhythms without a single misstep. Chyenne and Tamika and Kalia don't notice a thing. I am she. I thought it would be harder. I thought I'd have to convince them that they would be suspicious. It stings in an odd way that they aren't.

By lunch, the news of Lotus Blossom's breakdown has flooded the school. Better her than me, is all I can think. I feel vindicated.

Two days go by and none of the things I feared happening happen. Nobody at school sees through me. When I leave school, I go home to the right place. And all day long I am text text texting just like all the little squirrels around me. I have conquered Heather Webb's life in a totally bloodless coup.

On Friday I take the bus to Santa Clara, to pay Lotus Blossom Moackenzie a visit. I am a concerned schoolmate. I don't give my name as Heather Webb, of course, because it's common knowledge now that the poor girl has had a psychotic break and now has delusions that she's me. So that would be awkward. I say I'm Chyenne Hamish and nobody asks for ID.

When I'm admitted to see her, it's in a bland, sprawling day room. She's sitting at a table watching daytime TV. I barely recognize her. When she sees me, her eyes widen, but she doesn't start screaming or throwing chairs. She mutters something, "Can't" or maybe "cunt." Either is acceptable.

I stare at her for a little bit. "It sucks to be you," I finally say.

Outside, there's a 1967 Winnebago F-15 parked near the bus stop. An old guy is leaning against the side, his arms crossed over his chest.

"What's the word, bird?" he says to me.

"I'm sorry," I say. "Have we met?" I walk past him to the bus stop.

He gives me a long look. Then he gets in the Winnebago and drives away without another word, and I wait for my bus.



Lotus Blossom's Theory of Names

Matthew Sturges: writer

Carine Brancowitz: art

Todd Klein: letters

Angela Roufino: editor



EPILOGUE

NEW YORK CITY



IS THIS
THE PLACE,
KEELE?

OH, YES,
I BELIEVE
IT IS.



HEY! BARKEEP!
HOW ABOUT A ROUND
OF DRINKS FOR ME AND
THE BOYS?

SURE.
WHAT CAN
I--



PETER
KEELE.

HELLO,
HARRY.

GOOD
TO SEE YOU
AGAIN.

**NEXT: THE
CONCEPTION
REVEALED
(AT LAST!)**

