



# THE CURIOUS CASE FILES OF ELMWOOD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

ISSUE 1

WHO SITS BY THE WINDOW?

The curious casefiles of Elmwood, New Hampshire

Issue #1 - Who sits by the window?

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## The curious casefiles of Elmwood, New Hampshire – Issue 1

I was perhaps fourteen years old when my mother and I moved to Elmwood, New Hampshire, into an old house my grandmother left us after her passing. I remember driving up to the house as familiar as mere moments ago, with my mother lecturing me, “Reggie, this isn’t forever, I’ll fix the place up and flip it in a few months.” She was an optimist if I could say anything about my mother, but what she wasn’t was stable.

You see, my mother was an alcoholic and by midday she would be passed out on the couch, so as I returned home from school, I’d have free reign to do as I please. So when we moved, I took the time to hop on my bike and pedal around the town a bit to get to know my surroundings. I would sometimes ride to the border of Chamberlain, where the old train tracks sat and watch the lumbering hulks barrel passed for hours.

I would arrive home as the sun was setting to a mother just waking up and realizing dinner hadn’t been made time and time again. She would rush to her feet and begin cooking the moment she’d noticed me arriving home, trying to cover up that she had been sleeping. Her life was rough as my father left before my birth, two stepfathers passed away, one of cancer, the other in a car accident, but she was still a mother and coping as best she could.

Her hope was that she could do some minor repairs on my departed grandmother’s home, sell it for a small profit, and we’d move somewhere in New York. Two-months was the gameplan, but four months into our stay in Elmwood, she’d all but given up on that dream. I was enrolled in high school at the Bradley Washington school for gifted youth, a place for students who are deeply entrenched in all things... should I say, “Nerdy.”

Every day I would ride my bike to school a couple of miles down the road and only pass a handful of buildings marking civilization. A house, a pizzeria, a gas station, an apparel shop, and a large old mansion, which for some reason both terrified me and drew my attention daily. I would sometimes wonder off in my mind, thinking such things as who or what lives there, why I never see their car gone, and why even at night, I see only one light on in the house.

Hundreds of stories were formed over who owned such an elaborate dwelling, what they did, who they were, and none of the stories I came up with seemed to fit. I began asking around school, but no one had a clue, nor had they ever seen the owners, only an attendant who shopped for the owners of the mansion. Once a few fellow and I followed the attendant around as they shopped in the town, from the market to a butchers shop and back to the mansion.

None of us had a clue who they were, and in a town of only 777 inhabitants, most people know one another. One of my chums had a father who claimed when the house was built, no one lived there for over five years, then they just saw the car sitting there in the driveway one day. After a decade of living there uneventfully, the town pretty much no longer cared about the mysterious owners and left them alone.

Finally I found a retired postman who lived just past the old mill about five miles away from my home and I rode to his house to ask if he at least had a name of the owner. I knocked on his door and the old man opened it with a smile upon his face, happy to have a visitor, but wondering who I was. "Reggie, Reggie Martin sir, I've come to ask if you have a name of the old mansions owners?" I said politely.

The old postman nodded his head and invited me inside of his house for a cup of tea and to inform me of what he knew. The home smelled of old mothballs and incense, and as quickly as the man invited me to take a seat on his old brown loveseat, he rushed off to the kitchen. "I don't get many guests, I'm alone since my wife passed," the man shouted from the kitchen to me.

Moments later he returned with two cups of teas, piping hot and he placed them on his glass coffee table. "I was one of three postmen in Elmwood, the old Mansion was along my route," the man said as he sipped his tea. I took a sip of tea and replied;

"Sir, I never see the owners of the mansion, only an attendant, and only one light is ever on in the house at night. My curiosity has gotten the better of me and I can't stop thinking about the place."

"Larry...Peterson, I was postman Larry Peterson and from day one on my route that place was an enigma," the man said kindly. I smiled at the man and replied, "Did you ever get a name of anyone who lives there?" Larry had a serious look fall over him as he said;

"Well, at first, maybe the first two years, the mail there came in under the name Winston Carmichael. I looked him up all over the place and couldn't find anything on the guy. Then the mail started coming in under the name of a corporation, which was even weirder to tell you the truth, the Bannercroft Corporation."

"Why was that weirder?" Reggie inquired, "Well, I tried to find anything on the corporation even in public records and all I could find was that they are in importing and exporting antiquities." I'm sure I looked befuddled, but before I could even ask, Larry added;

"I scoured the internet, antiquities auction houses, dealers... no one heard of the Bannercroft Corporation. I left the mail in their mailbox daily, aside from bills, I delivered one red envelope with no return address on it there monthly, and never any packages."

My curiosity quickly turned into a full-blown obsession, and the more I spoke to Larry, the more I needed to know. "Is there anything else you can tell me?" I pleaded, hoping to pick what was left of the brain of the poor old man and Larry replied;

"Come to think of it, those red envelopes were very light... maybe a piece of paper or two in them and they came on the first Friday of every month. I never saw any trash bins by the road either, if someone is living there, they must be up to their neck in filth by now."

I felt like I needed to find out something, and Larry didn't have any more answers, but I had nowhere left to turn. Friends and their parents had next to nothing and the one lead I had, just left me with more of a mystery on my hands. I left Larry that day, with a smile and a handshake, but I was anything but happy with this enigmatic mansion and corporation.

I needed to devise a plan, something that would get me some answers and so I went home and looked up the Bannercroft Corporation online and found only one mention stating, "For information search the dark web." It was risky, I could get a virus, or even worse perusing the dark web, but I had to find answers, this obsession was all encompassing at this point. I downloaded the apps needed on my computer and made sure my antivirus was up to date, and I took the leap onto the dark web.

I spent hours traveling down the rabbit hole of the Bannercroft Corp and found dozens of random hints and clues which all seemed fantastical and more conspiratorial than investigatory. The fact that I was finding anything was reassuring, as other people have inquired, they knew the name, and they seemed as obsessive as I was. I met a man on a bulletin board who talked about Bannercroft, and we spoke back and forth through dozens of messages.

"Go out at night, watch the room with the light on and you'll see him," one of the messages proclaimed, "See who?" I replied, yet the messages ceased. I had a task now, something proactive to do, at night, I would ride my bike across from the old mansion and watch the window. My plan was set

That night I went to bed and waited for my mother to drink herself into a deep sleep, then I left the house and rushed to my bicycle. I pedaled down the road so fast that my legs burned, but I was a boy on a mission. I arrived just a few dozen steps from the mansion and quickly I hid behind a large bush across the street.

I peered up at the mansion and saw the single light gleaming out from the dark building, so I pulled out my cell phone. I started filming, though I hadn't seen anyone at the window, just the light, which seemed unnaturally bright. I turned the camera to my face and began speaking into it;

“This is Reggie Martin, and I am outside of the Bannercroft Corporation’s creepy mansion, investigating who lives there. One light is on in the whole place at night, and I was told a person comes and stares out the window.”

I flipped my camera back around the aimed it at the illuminated window, hoping to catch a glimpse of the watcher from within. “I don’t see anyone yet,” I remember saying, but patients were never my strong suit. I continued to sit fixed on the window, anxiously awaiting someone or something to make this outing somewhat eventful, and then it happened...

A shadowy figure sat frozen, peering out from the near celestial brightness of the room. The phone, even fully zoomed in, could not make out any discernable features of the individual, and they seemingly just sat there, eerily staring out the window. Nearly an hour passed and the person in the window did not move, and neither did I.

Suddenly, as if the person were a specter, they vanished from sight causing me to step back away from the bush. “I hope this was captured on video,” I remember saying, as I raced towards my bike as if I were being chased. I knew only one thing; I needed to get home and upload the video to my computer to see what I had filmed.

I arrived home to see my mother, still asleep on the couch, an empty bottle of gin laying on the floor, and I quietly rushed up the steps and to my bedroom. I plugged my phone into the computer and immediately uploaded my video to it, taking several grueling moments. Patience be damned, I logged onto the dark web and began posting;

“Tonight, was the night, I sat outside of the mansion and low and behold, there was a figure standing at the window, but that’s not the odd part. After a bit of time passed, the figure just vanished, like it disappeared or faded away.”

I switched over to my video player and fired the video up, which was clear as day. “Yes!” I exclaimed, as I began fast forwarding to the segment with the figure, however, I’d noticed the video blurred out the entire time the figure was there, yet sound continued. I went back onto the dark web forum and posted about my findings, then uploaded the video to the forum.

It took forever to upload the video, and in that time, I’d walked to my mother’s room, grabbed a blanket, walked down the stairs, and covered her, as she still slept. She seemed so at peace, as she snored loudly and bore a smile upon her face, sometimes it seemed as if only in her drunken slumber was happiness a reality. I took the empty bottle from the floor, walked into the kitchen and tossed it into the recycle bin and got myself a glass of water.

I walked back up the steps to my room and upon entering, I noticed that the screen of my computer was turned off. Peculiar as it was, I sat down and turned it back on to

find my computer logged out of the dark web and onto some strange webpage I'd never seen called, "True and hidden files." I looked down at my phone, still plugged into my PC and the screen was quickly flashing off and on.

I quickly unplugged my phone and it shut down, refusing to turn back on, "A virus," I first thought to myself. I looked back at my computer to see that it looked completely normal and the website it was on was no longer there. I ran a virus scan on my computer, while I tried repeatedly to turn my phone back on, but it was fruitless.

Trying to unravel this mystery had so far, only led to more mystery and by that time it had already cost me a cellphone and hours upon hours of my life. No virus was found on my computer, and it was seemingly fine after the odd instance. I decided to call it a night, turned off my computer, and went to bed...

At around three-o'clock in the morning my computer screen lit up and began making a loud beeping sound like an alarm clock. I jumped up out of bed and ran over and the moment I sat in front of my PC, the beeping stopped, and I looked up at my screen. Words scrolled across the screen quickly, repeating a single sentence without end;

"Do not invoke our wrath, we know you, we see you, we can always reach you, you cannot hide from us, cease your investigations."

My blood ran cold, and my hairs stood on end, a freezing wind befell me and terror gripped my spirit as if it were in a stranglehold. Despite my trepidation, I needed to know more about this shadowy corporation, I needed to find out how deep the rabbit hole traversed. I began typing on my computer and the words ceased to repeat as I did so, as I typed;

"I need to know what Bannercroft is, I need to know about the mansion, and nothing will stop me from finding out."

I do not know what I had expected to happen in that moment, but as I pressed enter, my computer restarted itself. The computer did not load as it had everyday before, but instead started up to a page which read;

"Bannercroft Corporation teleportal, you have been selected, to continue press enter."

I hesitated; what was this, why was this on the screen of my computer, better still, what was I selected for? I had too many questions I needed answers too and I know I should have just shut my computer off, but I pressed enter. The screen read;

"Bannercroft Corporation intake form #225-11 agent information and agreement"

I sat for a moment, hearing my mother puking downstairs, "Are you okay mom?" I shouted and she uttered, "Fine...I'm fine." I knew she was anything but fine, I walked down the stairs to see her barely held up at the kitchen sink, puke running down the wall behind the sink. "Mom, please get help," I remember saying, as the scent began making me heave. "I'm the adult, go to your damn room and stay there, I'm fine," She replied angrily, and I turned and did as I was told.

I sat behind my computer once more and saw that there was some sort of form to fill out. I filled out my name, age, address, and while I was reluctant, I did so without waver. As I pressed enter on the form another more perplexing question required me to answer, "What time is best for us to extract you." I was nervous, but I thoroughly thought it was some sort of joke at this point, so I put five-o'clock in the morning into the box and clicked enter.

The moment I clicked enter, my computer seemingly returned to normal, as if nothing had happened. I turned my computer off and could hear my mother stumbling around crying and yelling unintelligibly downstairs. I laid in my bed, pulled my covers up to my chin and began weeping at what she'd become, each tear a shattering of my heart and a smattering of worry in my head.

I'd looked over at my alarm clock and it was four-seventeen in the morning, I knew I needed to sleep and so I closed my eyes. I fast fell into a deep slumber, but before dreams could fill my mind, I was awakened by a thumping sound in my room. My eyes quickly opened and adjusted, but I saw nothing out of sort, as I looked around.

I sat up with my feet off the edge of the bed and yawned ferociously, before noticing my computer screen was on once more. I walked over to my desk and turned off the monitor and as I turned around to walk away, it turned back on by itself. I looked at the screen and a message popped up saying, "Go to your window and look outside, we're here for you."

I was frozen in fear, and I just sat there refusing to move an inch from my chair and another message popped up saying;

"Bannercroft Corporation has sent a representative driver to pick you up er your accepted application. Please pack a small bag and meet our driver outside, you have ten minutes."

I grew frantic and typed, "I changed my mind, leave me alone," and I turned my screen off and stood to my feet. The screen turned back on and I heard another loud thumping sound that seemed to come from the first floor of our home. "Please calmly follow your representative driver," a message said on my computer, before turning off.

I turned around and walked to the window, looking out, hoping to see nothing out of sorts, but the same car that sat outside of the mansion, was outside in my driveway. "Oh my god," I said aloud, and I heard yet another thump from below, followed by a slow and steady creaking of the stairs leading up to me. I rushed to my bedroom door and locked it, then grabbed the wooden chair in the corner of my room and put it under the doorknob.

The walking ceased and whomever it was, now stood directly outside of my door, causing a lump to swell in my throat. "G...go away!" I exclaimed, but the person outside of my room simply knocked on my door slowly and lightly. "Leave my house alone," I added angrily, attempting to play it tough, but inside I was terrified at what or who was knocking.

"Young Mr. Martin, we are here per your application," the low growling voice of a man said behind my door. "Go away," I replied loudly, as I picked up a baseball bat from my closet, "I mean it," I added. The man then said;

"Mr. Martin, you've completed the application and have been chosen to come to the Bannercroft Corporation. I promise you will be safe, and that all your questions about us will soon be answered."

"...and my mother?" I inquired, "She'll be as safe and protected while you're gone," the man replied. I moved the chair from my door and unlocked it, hesitantly turning the doorknob and ever so slowly opening it. The man was dressed in a black suit with a red shirt beneath his jacket and a black tie, very sinister and very professional looking in one. He had a long full beard, a wide brimmed hat and wore black sunglasses.

"Did you pack Mr. Martin?" the man said abruptly to which, I could barely utter "no," due to the fear traveling my body. "Is there anything important that you'd like to bring at least?" he then said to me in a firm voice. I walked into my room and grabbed a book of pictures, why, I didn't know if I'd ever be back.

We walked down the stairs and my mother was snoring loudly on the couch, I gave her a final look, one heartbroken last glimpse at the woman who raised me. A single tear trickled down my face, a tear that spoke of the half-life she and I had been living since she'd given up. I turned to the man and said, "Let's go," and we left the house and walked outside, with him leading me to the fancy black car.

I got inside of the vehicle, noticing that every aspect of it was black, sleek, and clean, and made of finer, pricier things. I buckled my seatbelt and the man said, "This is the company car, there is only one, I am the only one who drives it," firmly, yet with an eerie, almost artificial smile. "What should I call you sir?" I said to the man who looked at me and replied, "I'm called forty-four," without taking his eyes off the road.

Moments later we arrived at the house and forty-four and I got out from the vehicle, and he led me up the porch and to the front door. He pressed a number code on some electronic keypad and the door clicked and opened slightly ajar on its own. As soon as we entered the mansion, we were inside of a small all black room about nine foot long by seven foot wide, and seemingly without doors.

There was a single white line on the floor and the man put up his hand blocking me from walking beyond it. "Forty-Four reporting with Mr. Martin," the man said, and his voice echoed in the room like a small concert hall. The floor opened stopping at the white line and a set of stairs rose to the floor level and forty-four led me into the brightly lit downstairs.

Down the stairs was a long brightly lit hallway painted a shade of white that seemed to glimmer and lined with black wooden benches, with six large black doors without doorknobs. The area smelled sterile, like a hospital, and the tiled grey floors were immaculately cleaned. Paintings of men and women dressed in their finest, some period clothing and some modern, lined the walls above the benches.

"Have a seat," forty-four said to me and he sat across, baring the same artificial smile that would haunt a man's nightmares. "They will call for us shortly," he then said, and I replied, "Who will call for us?" Forty-four simply nodded his head, remaining silent, so I asked him again and he replied;

"Mr. Bannercroft, probably another member of the corporation, I can't say for certain. I promise you are safe here Mr. Martin and soon your questions will be answered."

We sat there silent, waiting, my patience being tested, again not being my strong suit, and so my legs fidgeted. I was nervous and anxious to learn what mysteries this place and this corporation held, but I was also fearful that curiosity might indeed kill the cat. Although the wait wasn't very long, it might as well have been an eternity, with my own mind gnawing and gnashing away at me.

"Mr. Reggie Martin to room two please," A voice echoed through the halls, and forty-four stood to his feet and waved for me to follow him. As we approached the door, it popped open on its own and forty-four led me inside. The office was dark, with very little light situated above a desk with two shadowy figures seated behind it.

"Have a seat," one of the figures said in a strong masculine voice, and a light lit up above a chair in front. The moment I sat in the seat, the room was flooded by lights, which temporarily blinded me, causing my eyes to need to adjust to the room. Once my eyes regained vision, I saw a man and a woman sitting in finely crafted office chairs, nestled behind a large hand carved mahogany desk, with the words, "Bannercroft

Corporation,” carved into the front. Behind the two were walls lined in bookshelves containing both new and old tomes numbered in gold relief.

“I am sure you have questions Mr. Martin, but let us introduce ourselves,” the man said in a dull and almost uncaring tone. The duo stood up and the man continued;

“I am Lord Archibald Bannercroft, and beside me is my sister, Lady Loretta Bannercroft and the two of us run this corporation. You, my boy, were selected due to your insistence in knowing about us.”

I froze, I could hardly move for some reason unbeknownst to me, and I felt a bit faint, but I managed to utter, “What is the Bannercroft Corporation?” The man smiled and replied;

“Straight to the point, are we? The Bannercroft Corporation a business, but we don’t sell items, we are investigators, sleuths, paranormal investigators to be exact. This organization was formed by my great great great grandfather, Sir Edmond Bannercroft, after his wife was mauled by some entity he’d never seen or heard of.

We protect people, we find those things which go bump in the night, and we fight them. We’ve done this for over two-hundred years, overseas in England, and now here in Elmwood, with a smaller satellite lodge in Chamberlain. We combine technology beyond the availability of the average person, with the arcane knowledge going as far back as Mesopotamia and Egypt. Magical tools and potions, symbols known as sigils, rituals and powerful spells... alongside modern weaponry, electronic devices, and even robotics.”

“Robotics?” I said, as my curiosity grew, and as Lord Bannercroft nodded his head, as he pointed to forty-four. “You’ve met one of our robots,” the Lord said, and forty-four pulled open his vest and shirt to expose wiring and metal. My eyes grew like saucers and my heartbeat quickened and Lady Bannercroft chimed in saying;

“We know your every step in investigating us, and though I am sure you have no actual leads, your work was commendable. The moment you began looking into this mansion, we followed your every move, we were there guiding you... we were those you spoke to on the dark web, and the retired postman was retired from Bannercroft.”

My eyes grew large as saucers, and a sense of overwhelming alarm filled my mind, and I replied, “So, why am I here?” Lord Bannercroft walked from around this desk, his hands tangled behind his back, and he said;

“Every three years we bring on a new employee, they are drawn from a well of potential candidates. Age is not often a factor as much as intellect and curiosity, as one

needs to be drawn to the unknown to work here. Life has not been kind to many of our employees, that is until they began their tenure with us.

So, you, just as dozens before you, were chosen for those very features Mr. Martin. When you filled out the form we sent, you gave to us permission to bring you in and to tell you everything we have today."

"Okay, so what is this job?" I blurted out in an almost rude tone of voice, letting my nerves get the better of me. Lord Bannercroft smiled, and Lady Bannercroft laughed aloud, before she replied;

"We need people such as yourself, to live here, to work with our team, to battle those things many do not even know exists. The two hotspots of our work lies in Elmwood and Chamberlain, which even with our considerable resources, we haven't figured out why. You, my dear boy, will live a lavished life here, wanting for nothing, and all we ask is that you read through the casefiles here, and try to determine elements which might help us."

I relaxed a bit in my chair and settled down at what the 'job' entailed of me, then Lord Bannercroft said;

"I will explain in even greater detail, your days will be relaxed, though the work necessary. You'll wake up, eat in your room, shower and be down in the records room by nine am. You'll have a communal buffet lunch by noon with your coworkers, then complete your workday at around three pm.

You'll be taken care of in all respects, lodging in a large, lavished room that is much like a studio apartment, food will be covered and prepared by a world class chef here, clothing will be purchased by you through our portal and covered by us. Your life will be paid for by the Bannercroft Corporation in full!"

A smirk came over my face and without reservation I replied, "So what's the catch?" Lord Bannercroft smiled and said;

"Ahh and here is where it gets a bit more tense for many. You will need to live a lie... no one can know anything about the corporation or your involvement. You will firstly need to concoct a cover story and run through it with someone we designate to help you with it.

If you want to travel somewhere, we have a railroad with a cart that will drive you just outside of town, with an exit that is hidden. You cannot be seen exiting or entering this building any other way. You'll live here, but you cannot bring anyone back here. Those are the general rules, as you get settled in you'll learn the minor rules of our team, and get into the swing of your new role here."

"You make it sound like I made up my mind already," I said, and both the lord and lady laughed aloud. "You signed the form dear boy, you already have," Lord Bannercroft said with a chuckle in his tone. "There is no going back," Lady Bannercroft then added, and a feeling of dread filled my body.

"What if I quit?" I asked, and lord Bannercroft looked at lady Bannercroft and said, "No one quits, some retire after years of service, but none quit ever," Lady Bannercroft then added;

"You would face circumstances that are wholly messy dear boy, your ability to cognitively communicate would be erased. Essentially, you'd be left a shell of yourself and nothing more, but I think you'll love your work once you start."

I would be lying if I didn't say I was panicked, then Lord Bannercroft said something that put me at ease;

"You'll be able to visit your mother, complete school right here. We will tell her you've been accepted to a boarding school after protective services was called for her drunkenness. This way, you can visit her from time to time, and it may inspire her to quit drinking."

I relaxed a bit, after all, I didn't really have a choice...

"Forty-four, show him to his room, it may make him feel better," Lady Bannercroft said calmly. Forty-four stood up and led me back out into the white, hallway, up into the small black room. The floor of the black room returned to normal and the wall in front of us slid up, revealing a long hallway and a set of stairs at the end.

The walls of the hallway were white and lined with doors and paintings of various sizes and themes. I was led down the hallway and up the stairs to the second floor, which again was a long hallway with a set of stairs on the end, lined in artworks. Room number 2-1 was opened and forty-four led me inside of it, and while I believed it would be just a room, I was greatly surprised.

Inside, my "room," would turn out to have its own living room, kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom inside, and was fully furnished in Queen Anne style. One thing I had noticed and found strikingly odd, was that there were no windows. Forty-four put his hand on my shoulder and said, "In anticipation of your arrival, the fridge and pantry were stocked."

Moreso than it being a room in the mansion, it was an apartment, and a very nice one at that. "I'll leave you to get acquainted with your room," Forty-four said, and I halted him, asking, "Who is the man in the window?" finally remembering my biggest question. Looking at me with the largest artificial grin on his face, Forty-Four replied;

“The hologram, we use it to give the illusion of a single occupant and to lure certain individuals to inquire about us, such as yourself.”

Forty-Four left and I closed the door behind him, walking around my new home and taking in everything I’d learned. I walked into the spacious bathroom and noticed on the sink a small unopened package containing a toothbrush, and toothpaste, and a new bottle of mouthwash. No stone was forgotten or left unturned, no element of necessity or want was left; food, clothing, grooming, were all taken care of for me.

I couldn’t for a moment say that I was thinking about working for the corporation, I was absorbed into the apartment that seemed tailored to me. Similar posters from those I had on my bedroom wall at my mother’s house, were hung around my bed, and my refrigerator seemed to be full of the foods I would regularly eat. There was one thing for certain, the Bannercroft Corporation knew how to stake out a person’s life and gathering information.

Around an hour passed and a knock fell upon the door to my room, and a small video player I hadn’t noticed before showed me a young man standing outside of my door. “Come in, I guess,” I said, as I didn’t know how to open the door, as it lacked any knobs. The door seemingly opened on its own and the young man spoke;

“Hey, I’m Cecil, sort of the unofficial welcoming party for newcomers here. I was told you’d be coming in today and I wanted to introduce myself to you and make sure you’re settling in.”

“Hi Cecil, I’m Reggie, and everything seems great.” I replied to his kindness and Cecil continued;

“Great, by the way, the doors here can be confusing but from the inside there are dozens of ways they can be opened by phrases, from the outside, you just say your name. Everything here is sort of a blend, high tech and old-world gothic almost, I dig it really.”

“Me too, it’ll take a bit of getting used to though,” I replied with a smile on my face...a smile I haven’t felt in a long time. Cecil then responded;

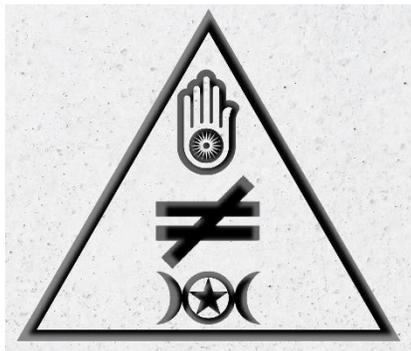
“Hey, I’ll swing by around lunch and pick you up, I’ll show you to the cafeteria, introduce you to everybody and show you how to order food if that’s cool?”

“Absolutely, thank you so much,” I said and with a handshake, Cecil left, and my door closed on its own. “Open,” I said, and the door opened, “close,” and the door closed, and when the screen was not showing who was outside of my door, it would turn the color of the wall and blend in. It was unlike anything I’d ever seen, this place was unlike anywhere I’d ever been, and I was to call it home.

Cecil came back and picked me up around twelve thirty, having a huge smile upon his face. "The others love when someone new joins our little family," Cecil said in an excitable tone of voice. "Is it new blood, or fresh meat?" I spoke and Cecil laughed saying, "No we're a friendly lot here," in a kind tone.

As we walked down the hall, Cecil explained some things to me I hadn't noticed;

"Most of us were orphans, had horrible family lives, a few were homeless, then we were picked up and recruited. This place is paradise compared to how most of us lived before... some needed peace, some needed comfort, some needed a family... we got all of that and more with the corporation."



We arrived at a wall with a strange symbol, it resembled a triangle with three odd markings inside of it. "The symbol?" Cecil said aloud, and I shook my head, and he added, "It's a symbol of protection for us, three parts that comprise the whole." I nodded as if I understood, however I had no clue, and Cecil continued;

"The hand is a ward against evil, the unequal sign basically tells evil it isn't equal to us here, and the bottom symbol is a sign of the craft... witchcraft, but the good kind."

"So... you're witches?" I blurted out, slightly afraid, and Cecil smiled and replied, "No, but the Bannercroft family are, most of us are atheists." He rose his right hand and said "open," and the wall opened up revealing a brightly lit cafeteria with a huge wooden table and a dozen chairs, vending machines with food and a kitchen off to the side.

Six people were sitting around the table talking and as we walked in, they all turned to Cecil and me and waved us over. Cecil smiled and said;

"This is Reggie, the new guy, Reg, this is Carrie, Mark, Dominic, Sandy, Dave, and Mary, Larry and Gary aren't here yet."

Everyone shook my hand and were kind enough to welcome me into the fold as a new friend and part of the crew. A few minutes later, Larry and Gary walked into the cafeteria and came up meeting me and welcoming me into the group. One thing I immediately noticed was that the oldest person there seemed to be in their late twenties, so I asked;

"Everyone is so young here, doesn't anyone age? Like this place seems like heaven to me, why aren't there any old people staying here to work?"

Mark said, "Retirement with benefits my man," and Carrie added, "We work twenty years here max, then we get set up with a house anywhere we want, a background

story to disguise our past, and a smooth two mil to live on." I was taken back by what I heard and asked, "Why?" and Cecil said, "So they can bring in more kids who need this place," and I was truly in awe at what I had learned of the corporation.

"You're telling me, I'd be able to retire at thirty-four, have a house and be a millionaire?" I quickly and without thought said aloud. "Yup, that's exactly right," Larry said with a smile on his face. A pizza was served to us by a man who could best be described as quieter than silent and taller than anyone else there.

As we ate, I hesitantly asked, "So, what is this work like?" and the group chuckled a bit and Dave said;

"Look, the work isn't hard really, we rummage through casefiles, some closed, some opened, and look for things. We're told what to find and we just read and take notes, nothing too difficult. Sometimes our work crosses lines between elmwood and Chamberlain, then we look through external files. That's it..."

I still didn't understand fully what strange job I was going to perform, but I supposed I would be trained in some capacity. It was almost party like within the group, everyone chatting, laughing, smiling, telling stories, it was immediately as if I fit in, and these people were my tribe. Everyone wanted to know about me, and weren't shy about telling me about themselves, and I had never felt more welcomed in my life.

"We're all misfits here, this place is like the island of misfit toys," Cecil then said to me, and everyone laughed. "They do have some strictness here though, I'll be honest with you," Gary then said to me in a serious tone of voice. Gary stood to his feet and continued saying;

"It's lights out by eleven here, but you can be in your room reading or whatever, you just can't come out from it. Second, you have to work, on time, doing your job, which is simple really, and the hours are phenomenal. Holidays, weekends, personal days, birthdays, all off, all paid, plus medical, vision, and dental are 100% covered. Third, and most importantly you stick to the lie about everything, you cannot reveal anything about Bannercroft Corp to anyone, ever.

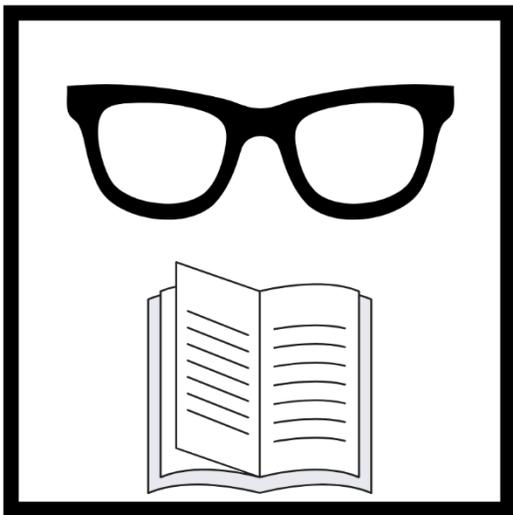
We also keep our rooms clean, and help keep this place clean, no littering or leaving a mess. Once a week inspections, but don't worry, it's just to make sure your place is clean, it's chill."

This was a living dream to me, like I went to bed one night and woke up in the merry old land of Oz. That was probably the biggest and most joyful time in my life at that point, and honestly, it was an easy period of adjustment to just fit in. That night when I went back to my room, I sat down at the writing desk in a corner, and just took several deep and longing breaths.

A sense of calmness, a sense of relief from the worries of the world fell over me, and I was just there... existing... being...

That night I didn't feel a longing for a night without worrying about an adult drinking themselves to an early grave. I wanted a night that I wasn't cleaning up something gross, where the noxious fumes of bad decision making, and self-pity permeates. I felt free and I felt a part of something bigger than just me, although I didn't quite understand what it was exactly.

I slept a deepness I hadn't felt while sleeping in many years, a deep rapturous calm that swept over and embraced me. My dreams were calm and vivid, pleasant and drawing, as if to pull me deeper into slumber. The next morning, I woke up and decided to take a shower and make an omelet for myself.



I got dressed in my daily fineries and my doorbell rang right on time, with Cecil standing on the other side, waiting to take me to orientation. We exchanged our good mornings, and he led me up the stairs to the third floor, staring at a wall with an odd symbol on it for a few minutes. "That's your job you know?" Cecil said to me, and I'd soon find out just how much he wasn't joking.

The door opened leading to a room, covered in books, bookcases, old desks and chairs and one person, Mark, was already sitting there reading through something.

We walked inside of the room and Cecil said;

"This is 'central' it's literally the life's blood of Bannercroft Corporation. Thousands of tomes written by hundreds of employees or acquired by other means. Every book here, every story here was written by someone; some are cryptic messages we want deciphered; some just want to be read... others still, might yield fragments. You'll notice tons of writing supplies around here, pencils and paper, it's in case someone finds a fragment.

A fragment is always the goal, it's why we're here, what our job is. A fragment is wisdom long forgotten but gleamed in the stories of both the ancients and their current descendants. These are not just myths or made-up fiction to scare you, these are real accounts, real stories passed through countless generations. You read... if you learn, you write it down, simple enough...?"

I smiled and nodded my head, and Cecil picked up a book and tossed it to me, from that day onward, I was hooked. The truth is, the work was fascinating and some nights I would take a book home with me to continue reading it. 'Central' became a second home and a hub where we'd hang out while still reading our work intermittently.

It seems like a lifetime ago, so I've decided to write about some of the abominations, the horrors, the inhuman, the supernatural, and the arcane, and share them here. These casefiles I have been authorized by the Bannercroft Corporation personally to release to the world.

This has been all of our lives work, me for a decade with a decade left to tenure, and the corporations lives work, countless employees in its rich past and its dark history, I've personally uncovered for the corporation. Many lifetimes, many stories, all real, unequivocally, and undeniably real...

This has been my story, about a place unlike anything else, in the little town of Elmwood, New Hampshire. So, I found out the man in the window is an illusion, a specter to keep up appearances, like the Wizard of Oz. That was the easy part, the hard part was yet to come...