

The Man with the Glass Stories

Windrem Smith

The old porch floorboards creaked, trying to give us away. I winced every time one of us stepped on a weak point, my stomach flitching with every step. I didn't want to be here. It was a night that encouraged bad choices. The moon was watching in entertainment. The night had started pretty fun, but now, because I had adrenaline-seeking friends, we were sneaking into some stranger's porch. I had tried to put my foot down about doing this, but Drew and James had pried my foot back up. Camryn was just going along for the ride. They dragged me across the street to Creep House. My palms were sweaty despite the cold, uneasy, and regretful wave that had started to tie itself into my lungs.

Grim House was the deviant house in the neighborhood. Every neighborhood had that one house that was always falling apart. It was one of the largest ones on the block but, in turn, was also the most rundown. It was built from a mixture of black brick and black tiles chipped or peeling. The front porch looked like termites had thrown a one-night party and forgotten to clean up after themselves. The front yard had been let go like a rabid dog and any type of plant/weed that could have grown had taken over the front yard with a vengeance. The smell of plant odor and dirt spread through the air, sticking to the back of my throat. Protecting the rest of the neighborhood from the front yard was a stomach-high black metal gate.

"Are you going to stand there, or are you going

to go in?" asked Drew, looking at me and the four others waiting for my response. "Well?"

"He's gonna wimp out," said Drew, turning to the others after I hadn't given him an answer.

"Hey! I didn't say that! I'm thinking about it! I'm sorry that I don't jump at the things that are considered against the law, like breaking," I said, slightly defending myself.

"What are you so scared of?" asked Camryn, teasing me, walking past me, leading the way into the house, and saving me from the judgment of the others. She pushed the door open with the cool jet back handle. The others stopped pushing me, no longer interested, and followed Camryn as she led the way.

The front door was slightly ajar as we approached it, trying to remain quiet even though the damaged wooden floor of the porch was trying to give us away. The front door was black and had a small Stain glass window in it of a dragon, a tiger, and a few smaller humanoid figures. Camryn pushed it with a finger, and both Drew and Camryn peered inside, looking for any innocent residents.

The inside of Grim House did not match its outside. The outside looked like it was bombed out and depleted; the inside looked like the warm, comforting home of a professor. Warm light bounced around the house, welcoming us in even though we were intruding. The smell of cinnamon biscuits intoxicated the house. Fancy items

decorated the place, all looking like they were from different cultures. Showing off that whoever lived here was well-traveled and cultured. There was a fancy Middle Eastern red, yellow, and black rug on the floor. Masks that looked like they could have been from some section of Africa and others that could have been from Asia. There were photos of places that I had never seen pop up on the Google image search engine, but they looked like places one would have on their bucket list. I took out my notebook and wrote a few notes about the items on the wall. They were great things to add to my writing later. There was a set of stairs going up the second story that turned right before another stained-glass window.

The living room was right off the entrance hallway. More interesting-looking world pieces decorated the walls of the living room; an old grandfather clock that was smooth to the touch ticked wisely against one of the walls, watching guard over the living room. The tables around the room were cluttered with stacks of papers and folders that were organized by an invisible pattern that I couldn't see. White marked-up paper is broken apart by the occasional orange, green, yellow, lavender, or tan paper. A long-stained glass window of a landscape with a village, mountains, a forest, and an ocean looked out back onto the street we had come from. Running around the room on three-fourths of the room were floor-to-ceiling bookcases, the colorful books stacked sideways like squarely stacked colorful bricks. All tied together with an active, comfy-looking fire, with an inviting-looking sofa and chair that once you sat in, you wouldn't be able to get out of.

I scanned the bookcase as the others explored the rest of the room, opening any drawers and cabinets to see if there were any secrets that had been stuffed inside. I ran my hand across the covers of the books, recognizing some covers and not others. Some looked rare, and others looked like

they had been bought at a thrift shop. I ran my finger over the spines of the book like a car going over speed bumps made of paper, leather, and cloth. As I read the covers, something moved in the edge of my vision; it was a quick blur. When I turned, nothing was there, just the stained-glass window. It was looking out to the front yard. It had an artistic landscape of an old medieval town and castle. Human figures stood around doing various day tasks. A little man carried out bread. Some farmers worked on a field with their little glass hos. A little prince with a caravan of knights also wandered in the streets. All were in a frozen time glass tapestry of color. It was a pretty glass window, but why someone would have one preventing them from seeing their front yard was confusing.

"Hey, you, ok?" asked James, coming over to the bookcase to look through one of the cabinets.

"I thought something moved," I said, still looking.

"That would be your overactive imagination, brother," said James, clapping me on the shoulder and looking away from me. "There is no one—"

James didn't finish his sentence, but it was disproven immediately. The door on the right side of the room ripped open, and a man emerged from the door that led into the kitchen. He had a thick set of grey peppered hair that was twisting and waving like a storm front. He had a hard face that was weathered and marked with time; his wrinkles showed rich life experiences. His eyes were deep and contemplative brown, holding wisdom and reflecting in a pool of kindness. Yet his head was at full attention, and his eyes moved around the room, looking at all of us.

"What the hell are you doing in here?!?!!" said the old man. "What are you doing in my house? Get out! Get Out? Trespassers!"

We didn't have to listen to him fully; by the time he was finished yelling, we were already running. James and Drew were laughing and screaming in slight adrenaline-filled excitement as they ran, and

Camryn was slightly screaming. As I bolted out the front door, I thought I saw something move in the glass, but I didn't stop to question it. I ran across the front porch onto the stone walkway down. One of the rocks poking out of the ground more than the others reached out and grabbed my shoe, like some gremlin hiding in the cracks. I slammed into the ground, grinding my hands on the rocks and gravel. I pushed myself back up without hesitating like one powerful push-up, not feeling the burning sensation in my palms.

We ran across the street and didn't slow down for a second, adrenaline pumping through our veins, feet pounding against the pavement. James and Drew were a few steps ahead, laughing and shouting as they scrambled toward the alleyway where we always met up after a good scare. But my mind wasn't on the chase anymore. It was on what I had left behind.

While running, I felt my pockets instinctively to make sure I had everything. My heart dropped; my notebook was no longer in my pocket. I had dropped it. My notebook was my sanctuary. My escape, if you will. I had poured my heart and soul into it; it was a part of my mind. Every sketch, every word, every thought felt like a piece of me that I couldn't express anywhere else. The pages were stained with my hopes, my fears, my frustrations— some things I could or would never say aloud. It was the one place I could be honest, raw, and vulnerable without fear of judgment.

It wasn't just a collection of stories or drawings; it was a record of my very self. Every time I opened it, I felt like I was reconnecting with who I was and maybe even with who I wanted to be. Losing it wasn't just losing a book—it felt like losing a part of my soul. That's why, as I stood in the darkened street with my heart hammering in my chest, there was no question. I had to get it back.

The others might have thought I was overreacting, but they didn't understand. They

couldn't. They hadn't spent sleepless nights pouring everything they had into a single object, a single outlet, like I had. That notebook was more than just paper and ink—it was my lifeline.

I couldn't leave my notebook there. I had placed all the stories and ideas I had come up with. Things that I had learned and things that had inspired me were stained into the pages. It was a part of me. It was a part of my soul, and I needed to get it back. I was willing to get into trouble to get it back.

I peeled off from my friends as they ran back to meet up with our larger friend group, probably excited to tell them about the scare. After 20 minutes of debating and trying to let everything cool off, I walked up to the house again. The house was just as nice as the night before. Light through the stained-glass windows lit up the house in colorful and oblong-shaped parallelograms. I knocked on the front door with a slight tap and waited.

"So that is yours," said a voice behind me. I jumped and turned and found the old man standing in the doorway. He was blocking my way back to the front door. The blood rushed out of my face. "I was wondering if someone was going to come back to grab it."

I stood still, unable to move. My eyes were as big as dinner saucers. I had been caught twice red-handed coming into his house.

"Sir, I'm sorry that—" I began, and the old man talked over me even though he was a little shorter. He moved to his right and towards the phone on the table. My heart was thinking in my chest, and sweat was sneaking its way out on my head and back.

"You and your friends are very rude. Why would you break into someone else sanctuary? A place where they think their privacy is safe and kept. You and your friends barged into here, a place where you guys were not welcome or invited."

"Yes, sir, I'm sorry, sir," I spoke. "It was inappropriate, and my friends and I did something

very wrong.”

“I should report you for breaking and entering. Do you want that?” Said the Old Man. “Actions always have consequences. The bill will come due. Should I call the cops?”

“Please, sir, don’t. I was just following my stupid friends. It was a mistake. I understand that I ruined your privacy.” I started to beg. “Please don’t call the cops. Please”

The old man paused, thinking. He tilted his head for a second as if listening to something next to him; the only thing there was the door. His expression changed and softened a little bit. Something in him, probably his kindness and patience that I didn’t deserve, was bubbling up.

“I was like yourself once, I guess. Making rash decisions that would end up as good stories. I guess karma comes back around,” said the Old Man, catching me off guard. It came out of nowhere. I didn’t realize what he had said. He opened my notebook and flipped through the pages. “I like your stories.”

“Thank you?” I said carefully, not knowing where this was going.

“The others and I enjoyed them. You have good pacing, and your characters are interesting. You have some talent.”

“Others?” I asked, afraid of who else knew I had broken into this house, but more importantly, that other people had read my writing. And Liked it. Instead of answering, the Old Man simply pointed at the Stainglass window in the living room. I didn’t know what he was pointing at first. I thought he was telling people inside. There was no one there. Was this guy crazy? I shifted my focus to the stained-glass window itself. It still had a beautiful landscape, but there had been a change. In front of the village now was a group of humanoid figures. They seemed to be looking into the living room, right at me. Then, a few of them waved. I thought it was a trick of the light coming through the stained glass, but

the people in the stained-glass window were moving. They were moving in the stained-glass window. I stared in awe.

“Are they...moving?” I asked, looking at the stained-glass window. The old man nodded. “Wh—how?”

“I don’t know how,” said the old man with a sarcastic lint. “In this house, all of the stained glass windows are alive. That’s how I knew you and your friends snuck in last night. The Tiger and dragon told me when you and your marriage crew entered.”

I watched the people in the Stained-glass windows move about. They didn’t have faces, but they were distantly human. Each little stained-glass person was as big as my palm. The stained-glass trees and clouds also moved in the window. I wondered how I had missed this.

“I watch over the stained glass windows. I keep them clean, and I keep them safe. Each window is a living story.” Said the Old Man, watching the window as well. “In return, they help me. I record the stories from the windows and write about them, turning them into books. Which always makes me money.”

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Quill Stroud,” said the Old Man, looking down at me even though he was shorter.

“Quill Stroud?” I asked, surprised, and my English nerd came out of me.

“Have you read my work?” He asked.

“Of course I have! Echoes of Eternity? Chronicles of the Celestial? Dreams of Dust? The Forgotten Realms Saga? Starsong Symphony? Silent Sins? Unraveling the Past? Tears in the Rainbow? Moonlit Promise? Stolen Moments? Of course, I have read your books! Anyone who can read has probably read something by you.”

Quill laughed at my enthusiasm. Good, the tension had broken between us; things were looking up.

“Ok, I think I know what we are going to do.”

said the old man, looking at me. The heavy feeling in my stomach returned. I prepared to get the police called on me by my favorite author. “Here is the deal. I’m getting too old to clean the windows; I won’t report you if you come back to the house every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Help me keep the windows clean and care for them. If you do that, I won’t report you and your friends. And I might even give a few pointers on how to write. That’s the best deal I can give you that’s not having you arrested for trespassing.”

I nodded in surprise at my sudden shift in luck, the weight in my stomach easing just a little. The old man’s offer was unexpected—too good to be true, honestly—but it was the lifeline I needed. I was still reeling from the idea that I wasn’t about to get thrown into a police car, but the thought of returning to his house three times a week, cleaning windows for him, actually seemed doable. And the promise of writing tips? That was more than I could have ever hoped for from someone I admired so much.

“Deal,” I said quickly, eager to lock in my escape. “I’ll be here. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. You have my word.”

The old man gave a slow, satisfied nod. He didn’t smile, but there was something in the creases of his face that suggested a kind of understanding. I think he might have seen something in me—something familiar, or maybe it was just the look of a kid who had gotten themselves in trouble and needed a way out. Either way, he didn’t press further, and for the first time in what felt like hours, I felt a flicker of hope.

“You seem like someone who cares about the craft,” he muttered, his voice softer now, almost conspiratorial. “That’s the kind of thing that can’t be taught in a classroom.” He leaned back in his creaky chair, eyeing me with something that almost resembled respect. “I won’t go easy on you, though. Cleaning windows is a lesson in patience. And

writing? Writing takes more than just words on a page. It takes discipline. Don’t think I’ll go easy on you there either.”

His words felt like a challenge but in the best way. It wasn’t a dismissal like I had feared but an invitation to learn, to prove myself.

“I can handle it,” I said, my voice steadier than I felt. “I’ll do whatever it takes.”

I glanced back at the windows—dirty, streaked with the passage of time—and realized that, in some strange way, this was just the beginning. The old man wasn’t offering me a simple task. He was offering me an apprenticeship of sorts, a chance to learn from someone who had lived through what I was only just beginning to understand. The world of writing wasn’t easy, and life sure as hell wasn’t either. But maybe, just maybe, cleaning those windows three times a week would teach me more than I thought.

“Good,” the Quill said with a small grunt like he was testing my resolve. “See you Monday, then.”

And just like that, the deal was struck. I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to pull it off or if I’d even be good enough to get any writing advice from him at all, but the weight of the night, the dread that had been pressing down on me, finally lifted. The old man was my second chance, and I wasn’t about to waste it.

As I turned to leave, I felt a strange sense of closure.

It was a great deal. In the next few weeks, I would head over after school and help clean the windows. There were thirty windows in the house, each one moving alive with its own story. At first, the characters in the windows hated me and wouldn’t interact with me, simply keeping out of my way when I cleaned the windows. After a few weeks, they started to be more open and communicate with me. I would talk to them in the window and talk back. I felt crazy for doing it at first, but soon, it became a habit. After a few months, the people in the windows

knew me well and trusted me. My favorites were the Knights in the Castle in the second-story bedroom window, the family that lived in the kitchen sink window, and the Court of Gods that lived in the bathroom (trust me, that was a surprise at first). The Knights in the second-story window were kind to me. Their window was 5x4 feet, and each knight was as big as my palm. They entertained me by putting on little shows of stories that they had. Stories of adventure, revenge, betrayal, dragons, and love. They showed me respect after I had shown them respect. I got so comfortable that I would start talking to their window about problems at school, and all the knights would listen patiently. After the 3rd month, they knighted me as one of their own, sworn to protect their and all windows of the house.

One day, I came to the house, and Quill wasn't there. I walked through the door feeling like the weight of the world was pressing down on me. Everything had gone wrong that week. First, the girl I had asked to prom—Sarah, the one I thought might actually say yes—had flat-out rejected me. Her reason? She didn't want to deal with the “weirdness” of me spending all my time at the old man's house. That was the last straw for me. I couldn't even explain what I was doing here; all I knew was it felt right like I was learning something, even if no one else understood it.

I trudged into the house, my footsteps heavy on the wooden floors, and the usual hum of quiet felt louder today, almost suffocating. The stained-glass characters in the windows—those strange, colorful figures that Quill had taught me about—seemed to pick up on my negative vibe. Their usual silent stillness was now charged with some strange energy. The colors of the glass shimmered more than usual as if the light was reacting to the tension in the room.

It was King Frances who spoke first. He was the king of the back window who never got along with King Andrew in the front window. He was one

of the glass characters I'd always admired for his intricate design and regal presence. A tiny figure, no bigger than the palm of my hand, but somehow, his presence always felt larger. His crown—made of shimmering yellow-gold glass—was always catching the light, and his royal reds and blues stood out against the darker tones of the room. His eyes—crafted from deep sapphire glass—seemed almost alive.

“What's the problem?” King Frances asked, his voice clear but soft as if it was coming from the depths of the glass itself. He had a regal tone, and his words always seemed to carry a weight, even when he was just speaking to me. He sat on a rock with his guards, watching me clean. “I sense some negativity coming from you.”

I sighed, running a hand through my hair as I looked at the floor. “It's just hard,” I said, my voice low. “I try to run after people who think they are good for me, but they keep slipping away, you know?” I paused, shaking my head. “I don't know what I'm doing wrong. I thought I had something real, but it always feels like I'm chasing after something that doesn't want me.”

King Frances didn't say anything right away. He just looked at me with those painted glass eyes as if taking in every word. The light flickered around him, making his crown shine brighter and casting gold reflections across the floor. His silence wasn't judgment but a weight—like he was processing everything I'd said. Then, after a long pause, he spoke again, his voice gentler this time but still with that same unshakable authority.

“There is an old story. There once was a man who loved butterflies. He was the type of person to chase after them. He loved them for their color and grace, and he worshiped them and adored them. But there was one problem: the butterflies didn't love him back. They would run and run away from him, and he could never catch them. No matter how hard he tried, no matter how carefully he crept toward

them, they always fluttered out of his reach. This made him very sad. So one day, he cried out, ‘Why won’t you let me catch you? I will care for you. Why do you hate me?’ The butterflies said nothing, of course. They just played out of reach, teasing him. Eventually, in his despair, the man called on his king, asking for help. ‘This is certainly not a hobby that is working for you,’ said the king. ‘You should pick a new one.’ The man looked at his king in surprise. ‘What should I do, my lord? I love butterflies too much,’ he said. The king thought for a moment and then spoke. ‘You should do something that you can control yourself, something that you can improve upon without needing the approval of others. If you love the outdoors, then learn to garden.’ The man was disappointed. He loved butterflies, not flowers. But still, he decided to follow his king’s advice. He put aside his obsession with the butterflies and, instead, poured his energy into gardening. He learned everything he could about plants and flowers. Over time, he became a great gardener, and he found happiness in it—true happiness, in creating something he could shape and nurture on his own. One day, the man came outside to tend to his garden and found the butterflies dancing around his flowers. They didn’t run anymore. They enjoyed his company now. They enjoyed the beauty of what he had created. ‘How did you know the butterflies would come?’ the man asked, rushing back to his king. ‘The butterflies came because of my garden.’ The king replied, ‘I didn’t know they would come. I suspected they might. But if they hadn’t, you would have still had a beautiful garden to enjoy.’”

I stood there for a long moment, processing what he had said. The weight of his words hung in the air, like the shimmer of his glass crown, settling over me like a cloak. I had been like that man—running after butterflies, constantly frustrated and confused as to why I couldn’t catch them.

“Create your garden, and the right butterflies will find their way to it,” King Frances said, his voice

quiet but his words clear.

There were more days when I would come walk to the house and find myself feeling down to be comforted by the glass figures. After quitting my job, the adventure in the guest window of the house told me her story of finding the places that value the most. The dragon on the roof told me about the value of patience after coming home from a bad soccer game. The king of the gods told me about the lesson of truth after learning about a lie with my friends.

The days that had started to pass quicker when I had also started to get along with Quill. Quill was like an interesting science teacher at high school. He liked everything organized, even though to the outside person, it looked like a complete mess of a system. He was quiet but talked a lot when he needed to interact with others, whether that was over the phone or online. He refused to let others do things for him, even when he was limited by age. Quill knew what people wanted before they knew what they wanted. Quill was becoming somewhat of a mentor. Quill started teaching me how to become a better writer, often running writing exercises with me as I worked.

I was returning from school to the house when I saw Drew, James, and Camryn. I was about to wave high when I watched James pick up a rock and throw it at the house. I watched, not realizing what was happening, until the rock flew through the air and burst through the attic window, shattering a stained-glass window and the story.

“WHOA!? WAIT! What are you guys doing?” I asked in horror as I reached them. My eyes did not want to believe what I had just seen.

“Helping you,” said Drew, picking up a rock and handing it to James. “We heard this old man was making you work for him. No more windows, no more work.”

James threw another rock, and I heard the braking of a window. The inside of me screamed in

pain.

“STOP!” I said, “You don’t need to do this. I’m ok with it.”

“Dude, this man is making you work and not paying you. It’s time to pay him a lesson.” Said, Drew. “Stand aside, brotha. What are friends for.”

“Not this,” I said. “Put it down, Drew!”

Drew winded up to throw another rock, aiming right at the front window. I ran forward and tackled him onto the ground. I hit him hard, and we rolled against the black asphalt; it took a little bit of skin as a souvenir. I rolled on the ground with Drew, trying to get him to unhand the rock. James came up behind me and grabbed me to pull off of Drew. I pushed back hard, and James fell on his back, and I was on top of him. I kicked him away. Drew was struggling to get back up, and I pushed him back down.

“What the fuck?” Said Drew, lying on the ground and rolling to get up.

“STOP! Just get out of here, Drew!” I spoke. “Don’t you dare break another window! Just get out of here! I don’t need your help. Everything you do is incorrect. You only do what you think is going to be fun.”

I didn’t listen to what Drew had to say; I ran into the house. Panicky checked all the rooms and was looking to make sure all the windows were okay. I ran inside the house and found Quill on the floor, looking at the broken glass. My heart sank at the sight of the broken glass; the tears built up behind my eyes. A sob wanted to come from the center of my chest. But I kept it together, trying to keep it from coming out. To be strong. On the ground lay the pieces of what used to be the Knight’s castle. The knights were no longer moving, the fallen warriors broken into pieces. It was a massacre.

“Oh my god! I’m so sorry, Quill. I don’t know what my ex-friends were doing. I’m so sorry. How do I...” I looked at the broken glass, shattered like tears on the ground. I picked one up, the rough and angry

edges scratching me.

I felt the world closing in around me, the pressure building in my chest until it felt like I couldn’t breathe. My hands were shaking, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t stop the lump in my throat from growing. Everything crashing down. I was standing on the edge of something I couldn’t control from tumbling. I wanted to scream, to throw something, anything, just to release all the frustration and hurt that had been piling up for weeks, months—maybe even years. But instead, I just stood there, frozen, my eyes stinging with the threat of tears. I wanted to hold it together, to be strong, but it was like a dam breaking inside me, and I couldn’t stop it. I tried to swallow the lump in my throat, to force myself to be calm, but my chest ached, my breath coming in shallow gasps. I hated how weak I felt, how vulnerable, and yet it was like I had no choice but to let it all swell up, threatening to spill over.

“We can refix them,” said Quill. I looked over to Quill. Quill was smiling. It was a knowing smile that was happy to see how worried I was about the broken windows. “Do you know what the best part of a story is? Its ability to change and evolve. Stories and their ideas cannot be destroyed, just reshaped. They evolve. We can fix the windows and make new stories. Stories are never truly and fully original; stories build off of each other. They build off of the older ones. Stories inspire stories. New stories are just the old stories with a twist. We can create a new one.”

“So, we can fix the window?” I asked, hopefully, the tears behind my eyes drying slowly.

“Of course, we can,” said Quill confidently and grabbed my shoulder and squeezed it to tell me it was ok.

Building the windows Drew and my old friends broke took six months to complete. We had to take the old glass and melt it back down, mixing it with new glass to make sure it kept the properties of

whatever was in the old stained-glass stories. We colored the glass and then shaped it, cutting the glass into shapes and putting them together to create new characters and places. We placed each new glass panel into the empty window, and each time the glass sprang to life, the new characters popped alive and moved around. Exploring their new surroundings. When we finished, we celebrated, just the two of us and the new characters in the windows.



It had been three years since my initial break into the house. Summer vacation had roots around, and I wasn't. A few months later, I went to England and returned two weeks later. It was a trip that Quill had suggested I take to learn more about writing, which he had been correct about. He had written a letter of recommendation for me, and in a month, I had been accepted into a writing program. After swinging by my parent's house, I returned to the story house. It was quiet inside, and the stained glass characters were quieter than usual. I started to clean when there was a knock on the front door. Reluctantly, I opened the door to see who it was; I was ready to see the Glass stories and Quill and tell them about my trip. The man in the black suit gave me a letter. On it was Quill's name signed in fancy ink and cursive.

"What is this?" I asked, holding it up. It was a crisp and fresh letter, kept in perfect condition. The edges were sharp to the touch.

"It is a letter for you. I was told to deliver this to you today," said the unnamed man in the suit. "Mr. Quill told me to give this to you."

"I'm sorry for your loss," said the blank man with no emotion, just programmed to deliver the letter. He turned around and headed back, leaving me alone with the letter and emotions. A mix that didn't feel all that great. I felt like I had just been thrown on the ground and trampled on. I opened the letter carefully, taking great care not to rip it. I opened the letter and read it slowly.

Dear Wright,

By the time you read this, I will have already gone—my story will have come to its final page, its last breath. But I don't want you to carry the weight of regret or guilt. Don't torment yourself over what you didn't know, over what I didn't tell you. I kept it from you, not out of deceit, but because I didn't want to add one more thing for you to worry about. You had no control over this.

Know that I am at peace. I have come to terms with the quiet, the end. I have no fear. It's strange, but I am happy. For the first time in a long while, I am content with how my life has unraveled. I hope when you think of me, it is with warmth and not sorrow.

You were never meant to be just the person who cleaned my windows. I was looking for a replacement. The world's dependence on stories is starting to wobble. Stories have been around for a long time and teach us how to live even if we can't live everything. And now, as I face this final chapter, there is only one thing I ask of you.

Take care of the Stories. The ones in the stained-glass windows are the ones I built over so many years. I am leaving you my house and everything within it. It will be held in trust for you until you are ready and of age. But the Stories? Those are yours now.

Remember this, Wright: Stories are mirrors. They reflect who we are, who we have been, and who we can become. They shine through the darkest moments, coloring our lives when everything else feels dull and grey. They are more than ink on paper or glass in frames; they are the living, breathing essence of us. You have a responsibility now, as a writer, as an author, to breathe new life into these glass walls.

Let the Stories morph and change; let them grow beyond their frames, beyond their glass. You play a form of God now. You create, you shape, you give voice to worlds that never were—worlds that have yet to come. Let them be your Glass Stories now, and let them shine with your light.

And before I go, let me share one final piece of wisdom with you, a lesson I've learned from my own life:

A father, wise in years, once spake unto his daughter, "Thou hast completed thy studies with honor and pride.

As a token of mine affection, I present thee with this steed, which I acquired many seasons ago. Though it is aged and worn, it still carries much of its past worth. But before I bestow it upon thee, go forth to the merchant's stall in the marketplace and ask him what he would offer for it. Let him appraise its value."

The daughter, being obedient, took the steed to the market and returned unto her father, saying, "The merchant, seeing its age and wear, hath offered but a mere sum of a thousand coins, for it appears much diminished in his eyes."

The father nodded and bade her, "Go then to the moneylender, and let him cast his gaze upon it."

She did as instructed and returned, saying, "The moneylender hath offered but one hundred coins, for he deems it naught but a relic of old."

The father, though sorrowful, said, "Now, go to the guild of noble riders and show them the steed."

The daughter, though perplexed, obeyed and soon returned. "Father," she said, "the members of the guild, offered a vast sum of one hundred thousand coin for the

steed! For it is not just any steed, but a legendary mount, rare and much sought after by those who know its worth."

Her father, smiling with understanding, took her hand and said, "My child, thou hast learned well. In this world, the right place doth see thy value. Do not be troubled when others fail to see thy worth, for it simply means thou art in the wrong company. It is those who truly know thee who will value thee rightly. Never remain where thy worth is not seen, for such places will only make thee feel lesser."

Wright, this is what I want you to remember: in life, you will encounter many places and people who might not recognize your worth. Don't be discouraged. Don't measure yourself by the eyes of those who cannot see you for what you truly are. Eventually you will find the right people. You will find your place. And when you do, the Stories will shine brighter than ever.

And so, my dear friend, I leave you with these words to carry with you as you step forward into a future where your worth is as clear as the glass around you.

With all that I am,

Quill Stroud