

FORBIDDEN DOOR

Before I was born, I was halved. New Age internet says many of us are this way, half-hearts looking for completion. I've been looking for my lost parts forever, so I am never not serious in love. It could be anyone, I used to think. I just had to find him and lock myself into him. I tried so hard to force the fit that sometimes I barely noticed that the force had broken me.

Something was different with Carl: I could listen to his thoughts and speak them back to him. We stared into each other's eyes, making a psychic rope. We knew we had to keep our bodies together as much as possible. Otherwise, our halves might pull apart again. I had never felt this way before; until a year earlier, I had never felt much at all for very long because I could mostly submerge myself through intoxication.

This meeting was fated. This was my other half. The intensity of my desire made me believe the divine had paired us, and I told him so. It had never been safe to tell a man I believed in something greater than myself—greater than him. It takes safety to dream: to play house in my mind, to build us a little life in the future, to believe we are living in magic and can use it to make us happy.

I had to go away for a week, and soon after, Carl had to go away for three. We never returned to each other, not really. Every day, I change my mind about whether he's my missing half or whether I just want him to be.

DREAM DOOR

Mark Twain was drawn to the British Society for Psychical Research, an organization seeking to reckon with paranormal concepts countering contemporary scientific principles, because of a dream. Twenty-four years earlier, Samuel Clemens dreamed of his younger brother's body in a coffin balanced across two chairs, the body covered by a bunch of white roses and one red one. Days later, in Samuel's waking world, a steamboat boiler explosion killed his brother. When Samuel approached the casket, he saw it balanced across two chairs. A nurse approached to adorn it with roses, mostly white, one red.

In 1891, after working with the society for several years, Twain published an essay in *Harper's* on what he called "mental telegraphy," known to most as telepathy, offering anecdotal evidence of correspondents sending "crossed letters" to each another (equivalent to today's text that arrives as the recipient is texting the sender), writers and inventors

coming upon ideas simultaneously and separately, and Twain's knowledge that he would run into a friend on the street before doing so. Over distances, he wrote, one mind develops an idea and another receives it. "We are always mentioning people, and in that very instant they appear before us. We laugh, and say, 'Speak of the devil,' and so forth, and there we drop it, considering it an 'accident.' It is a cheap and convenient way of disposing of a grave and very puzzling mystery. The fact is it does seem to happen too often to be an accident."

I don't remember the first time I found myself thinking a full sentence, out of nowhere, seconds before the person in front of me said that exact sentence. I do remember the moment, sitting in the back of my dad's truck, driving through our woods at night, I began to fear that my family could hear my thoughts. I thought I could hear other people's, which seemed like something the nuns would have called the work of Satan. I tried to close my mind-ears.

DOOR IN MY MOTHER

Eclipses occur when the sun, moon, and earth align. During a total solar eclipse, like the one happening around the time I was born, the moon passes between the earth and the sun, completely covering the sun when observed from a narrow strip of earth known as the path of totality.

By the time I was born, the bodies had moved out of alignment, but astrologically, the eclipse's effects were still in place to shape the life ahead of me. Eclipses energize events. Days later, the effect would be less potent, but I was likely affected by energy that lingered.

According to astrologer Charles Jayne, solar eclipses near the time of a person's birth "can be expected to inflate one's individuality, purpose, and drive." Bill Meridian, a student of Jayne's, adds, "While these individuals possess these strong qualities, they also shared a burden. They proved to be part of collective destinies. Their fate was beyond their control. They could not control or deflect the events in their lives . . . These folks are swept up in the collective energy of the eclipse."

On my birthday, another three-body alignment was in effect: a conjunction of the moon, Venus, and Jupiter. After the sun, these are the three brightest celestial bodies in our sky. They are known as *benefics*, having favorable influence. Their meeting in a natal chart is a blessing.

At the time of my birth, no planets were stationed retrograde. Most of the time—92 percent, actually—at least one planet appears to travel backward through the sky. For those of us born with all planets direct, the world feels fast, unpredictable, and intensified, and we are driven to conquer it.

None of this is nearly as rare as a comet's visit, but I choose to believe it to be auspicious. It is significant because it is mine.

A DOOR IS A SYMBOL

Astrology, tarot, and witchcraft are symbol-heavy systems, with archetypes foundational to the divine communication and understanding they facilitate. Carl Jung wrote, “The archetype is a disposition to produce over and over again the same, or similar mythic conceptions” and identified archetypal images like the witch, hero, and magician that exist as patterns or motifs within the collective unconscious. The images take form through repetition across individual psyches.

Astrology is based on a belief that planets have archetypal significance, a place in cosmic and mythic narratives that influences individual lives. Much of our astrological understanding comes from stories of the deities for whom the planets are named.

I came to tarot before astrology, maybe because the clarity of the archetypes was a way in, and as a literary person, I was predisposed to think in motifs. The major arcana features a series of archetypal figures, layered with symbolic resonance: THE MAGICIAN. THE DEVIL. DEATH.

Astrology Twitter introduced me to the Sabian Symbols, a long list of phrases (mostly images), one for each zodiac degree. They were recorded in 1925 by astrologer Marc Edmund Jones and clairvoyant Elsie Wheeler, who collected visions that came to her as Jones offered 360 face-down cards from a shuffled stack, each marked with a zodiac sign and number. Jones thought Wheeler had a psychic connection to an ancient Mesopotamian alchemist. Why he wanted to conduct this “experiment,” I don't know.

Some of the symbols resonate with me: a drowning man rescued; a serpent coiling near a man and a woman; the gate to the garden of desire; a canoe approaching safety through dangerous waters; miners emerging from a mine; a conversation by telepathy; the Great Stone Face. Others are strange: rabbits dressed in clothes and on parade; a man formally dressed and a deer with its horns folded; a rabbit metamorphosed into a fairy; a triangle with

wings. Nine symbols feature “Indians”: an Indian chief demanding recognition; an Indian woman pleading to the chief for the lives of her children; Indians rowing a canoe and dancing a war dance.

Symbols are problems when they reduce what shouldn't be reduced, placing significance not in what something is, but in what it brings up beyond itself. Some things are actual, though. Symbols are flat, without dimensions or depth, glimpsed on the way to finding meaning. Maybe there is danger in the reduction. But the mystery is so much bigger than me, like a constellation, every piece of it rendered to a speck I can connect with invisible lines.

BEFORE ASKING A QUESTION, REMEMBER

The thesaurus says *enigma* is considered to be a synonym for *riddle*, but an enigma is not a riddle. An enigma is something baffling, difficult to explain, or a mystery. It cannot be solved. The Latin *aenigma* comes from the Greek *αἴνιγμα*, which is from *αἰνισσεσθαι*, “to speak in riddles.” I make problems when I hold the mystery in my hands and think it's asking to be solved instead of the opposite.

DOORS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RABBIT HOLE

My Catholic picture books made me think heaven was a town built on a layer of stratocumulus clouds, which disappointed me, because I wanted a heaven like the garden on the other side of the door in Alice's wonderland. I considered myself the true owner of the library's copy of Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*, nesting in its puffy white VHS case until I could bring it home again. I studied Alice as she crept through the black woods and sat in disoriented defeat among the mome raths. I watched her shrink and grow. I was looking for the garden, too. Our lawn violets never spoke. There had to be a door somewhere, but I couldn't even find a rabbit hole to fall down. In the woods, I turned over rocks, looking for the underworld, always fearing I'd find a nest of snakes instead.

Once I could read, I worked through the book enough times to memorize parts. Maybe my woods were already wonderland. Maybe my cat would dissolve into a hanging grin. At school, when boys played games that ended with the loser having to kiss me without my invitation, I understood I was stuck somewhere, like Alice: “There were doors all round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the

other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again.”

In the Disney adaptation, Alice faces only one door. It is locked, and has a talking face. “You did give me quite a turn!” the door puns, and makes sure we get the joke: “Rather good, what? Doorknob, turn?” Alice peers through the keyhole mouth at the garden. In my recollection of the movie, the viewer sees what she sees. I can picture it: fountains, hedges, rosebushes, topiaries.

But I imagined the image. Alice doesn’t look through a door-portal until the film is nearly over. She’s been crying in the woods, singing to the creatures gathered to gawk at her pain, saying to herself, “It would be so nice if something would make sense for a change!” when the Cheshire Cat, a puff of purple around a crescent moon of teeth, tells her there’s a way out. He makes a door appear in a tree trunk. Alice steps in to meet the tyrant queen in her garden. I should have seen this as a cautionary tale: the girl thinks she’s looking for something that makes sense, but the deeper she pushes, the closer she gets to the seat of senseless violence in the world.