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Creative Fiction

Obsessions

The constellations in the sky were the ones that enamoured her, the ones that made her wonder at the worlds outside her own. They shone in unparalleled brilliance every night, each and every one of them with its own story to tell. The woman had watched them for most of her life and learned many of their tales individually. Point to any constellation, or name any from a fancy astronomer's tome, and she could tell you who they were. This, however, was not because she had studied them in her small studio apartment, and not because she would look out to them in her telescope propped against her bedroom window.

No, there were other secrets to these stars, ones that the woman had been told herself. In fact, these constellations were the ones that had told her.

It wasn't until recently that she started talking to them.

She was wandering the downtown streets near her home one evening, when she discovered a mysterious shop hidden in a back alleyway. The buildings around it were tall and imposing, shading from view almost any signs of its dark brick walls. She barely noticed the shining blue sign that read "North Star" over the top of the doorway. Curious, even mystified by its appearance, she went inside.

It was a wonder how quickly she was caught up in the whirlwind of displays. She didn't notice the old man who peered at her from behind the counter. There were small trinkets everywhere, clusters lining the few shelves inside and cascading over the table by the front

window. Crystals, potions, and dusty old books filled all the available space inside the small shop. Everything seemed to glitter with an almost otherworldly beauty that made it hard for her to tear her eyes away. She was just about to pick up a book with an outline of a star when the man coughed, and she looked up.

He seemed to stare right through her with his cloudy eyes. Small and stocky, and seemingly very, very old, he watched her carefully.

“H-hello,” she stuttered out. “You’re not closed, are you? Did I wander in at the wrong time?”

“No, but I’ll be closing soon, so hurry up,” he barked gruffly, and said nothing else.

Unsettled by the unwelcome atmosphere, she turned away and flipped cautiously through the pages of the book she had noticed. As soon as she saw the contents, she knew she had to have it. Ignoring the far fancier and shinier pieces of merchandise, she placed the book in front of the taciturn old man. He simply raised an eyebrow at her, and that’s when she got a chance to look more closely at him. Both of his arms were covered in tattoos of intricate symbols that were almost satanic in nature. She had no idea what any of them meant, but they were ominous and obtrusive. When he reached reluctantly to scan the book for her, she noticed a golden ring on his wrinkled hand in the shape of delta, the symbol for change.

It was identical to one of the marks on the binding.

“Are you sure you want this book? Is there any reason in particular you picked it out?”

The man stared at her suspiciously, as if looking for an answer in her eyes. Taken aback, she stuttered out her answer.

“I... don’t really know. I’m just interested in the stars, and it stood out to me the most. I study them for a living.”

Satisfied with his answer, he nodded. Instead of asking for any kind of payment, the old man just handed it back to her. “Take it.”

“What?”

“I’m giving it to you for free. It deserves a better home anyway.” His face darkened, and something strange seemed to take hold of him. For a moment, there was a faraway look in his glassy eyes, and then he pushed the book towards her more forcefully.

Confused but not willing to question it, or to stay in the shop any longer, she took it, spared one last look at the man, and walked away.

As soon as she got home that night, she spent hours studying the contents of the book. At first glance it seemed normal, but the further she delved the weirder it got. The pages were almost alive, and seemed to breathe to match her own exhales. If she hadn’t been convincing herself that she was overtired, she would surely have believed that the pictures moved.

Something about the poems to recite on the last few pages made her uneasy. They oozed maliciousness, and she felt a pull deep down to speak the strange words aloud. The thought quickly claimed its hold over her mind, and she found herself whispering the words to herself. The book began to glow, brighter and brighter, until the blinding light seemed to fill the room. Its intensity grew and the words carried on, no matter how hard she tried to stop herself. With one last final sentence, the world froze and the voices began.

This was how she started talking to the constellations in the sky. Every night since that day, she would hole herself up in her office and recite the poems from the book. When the light faded, the constellations would appear before her in an unearthly glow. They were vaguely human-like in form, but never fully opaque, and hard to look at directly. Each one of them was rather similar, but they all shone in slightly different shades of colour.

She had her favourites. There was Cygnus, the swan, who was as shockingly white as the animal itself. Taurus, the bull, was an almost off-putting shade of brown. Pictor, the easel, was a mixture of colour that rivalled the rainbow.

They told her their names, their secrets, and about their lives if only she promised never to repeat the words aloud. They told her how the world came to be and how they had been watching over the earth for centuries. She would call to them whenever they came out at night, and they would answer.

It wasn't long until it became an obsession for her. She began to crave their knowledge more than she craved being amongst other humans. She held on to her own disaster.

Before, she had been beautiful, with long flowing golden hair, and eyes that shone a deep and mystical blue. Now, she was slowly shedding her locks, and her eyes had become grey and stony. She refused to go outside, and ate only when she could no longer stand to be hungry anymore.

She never again saw the old man that gave her the book, nor did she ever find the shop that it came from. She hardly cared, either. Once, she started to wonder if it was cursed, or if she had simply stumbled upon her own ill fate. Once, she had cared about the world around her and

the people who lived in it. But everything had changed since then. She was now lost in the memories and stories of these stars.

Often, at night, she would lay huddled in the corner of her bedroom, scattered pages of the book surrounding her. The face that peered out from the dark corner of the room was no longer hers; she was no longer the same person who had fuelled her obsession with innocent information about the stars.

They began to whisper to her, and the stories ended. She, herself, would be consumed by them.

Later, as time passed, everything became silent in the woman's small home. The pieces of her life that still remained lay covered in dust and forgotten. The house was empty. There were no signs of life, no remaining form of a living breathing human to be found. The cluttered belongings were the only sign that someone had lived there. It wasn't until her sister came to visit her in a few week's time that the world would find out why. Only the shell of a human was left, lying defeated and rotting in the absence of light. A sobbing cry left her sister's mouth, and it became the only promise left that someone had cared about her.

They told her that it was an accident, the way that the woman's body lay broken and lifeless where the two walls met on the far side of the room. She watched as the police took her body away in a black plastic bag, face covered by the zipper that would conceal her withered appearance forever.

Her sister's blank eyes slowly filled with tears as she scanned the room for any signs of a struggle, or any sign that maybe this could have been an accident.

That's when she saw the book beside where her sister once lay. Her eyes were drawn to it immediately, and she crouched down to pick it up. A thought, whispered in the voice of her sister, told her that she should take it.

The cover was lined with intricate calligraphy, words woven seamlessly into the leather, and a small golden triangle on its binding. As she flipped through it, the words seemed to dance off the pages, and mysterious incantations jumped at her from within the text. In fact, it reminded her of her writings and ongoing novel. She decided that it would fit in perfectly with own her collection. She cradled the book in her arms, took one last look at her sister's apartment, and walked out of the door with another new piece to add to her obsession.