

Knowing sparked in her blood.

The pulsing heat of the Milky Way spilled through her, and with it an image so vivid she could nearly touch the spinning mass of stars and planets moving at breathtaking speed. Just like that, she was plugged into the cosmos. Why she was plugged in was as mysterious as the star-studded images wheeling before her eyes.

Quickly she shut off the Camry's engine. The wide boulevard meandering through the cemetery's green hills was vacant. No other families were taking advantage of the mild spring day to visit loved ones. She was thankful for the privacy, as the birdsong drifting from the trees grew faint. The image cascaded down before her eyes. The frenetic warbling died away completely. In tandem, the rolling hills and the well-tended graves faded beneath the limitless blue of deep space expanding before her.

Massive, revolving planets seemed to weave through her neurons and bind with the fatty tissue of her brain, knitting her into a magnificent scene unfolding like a carpet of dreams. Sensation left her arms and legs. The familiar nausea came next as her mind separated from her body. Her consciousness rocketed skyward, beyond the atmosphere and the placidly revolving moon, to a point above the solar system's fearsome rotation. She was not an onlooker. She was bound within the cosmos, which had effortlessly blocked out the here-and-now.

Suspended outside of time, she appraised the planets with familiar awe. Greyish dust cradled the rocky surface of Mercury. By comparison Venus appeared featureless, glowing a subtle yellowish-white. An unseen force momentarily prodded her attention past earth, to crimson-faced Mars. The warrior planet spun into view, only to retreat when the colossal Jupiter made an entrance in a shimmering parade of golden hues and toffee browns. Saturn, Uranus and Neptune were also showstoppers. At last lonely Pluto swam forward, a boulder twirling in black seas.

Then nothingness.

This momentary pause in the action never failed to frighten her. The utter lack of sensory perception, the folding in of her mental faculties, was an intimation of death. It seemed she didn't exist at all. But she knew from hard experience the moment would pass. Soon she detected the barest outline of the sallow-faced moon, the craggy, rounded surface luxuriating in the sun's riotous orange and warming yellow lights. Slowly now,

she was lifted above the moon. If there was a moment during the dreaded knowing she grudgingly savored, this was it.

With reverence she appraised the earth, a blue dot gliding in a noble path around the sun's whipping fire. Clouds drifted across a landmass she finally identified as Europe. Ocean waves became visible, undulating in a hypnotic rhythm. At the sight of the purplish-blue seas, pangs of affection surged through her.

Too quickly, she was ripped away. The solar system faded, the planets sinking from view. But this prelude to the main show did not release her from her prison, and an invisible force propelled her consciousness into a larger configuration of stars beyond the familiar solar system. The image was blinding, a thousand pinpricks of light. Once she was certain she could endure no more, when the laser intensity of the light had blended into a terrible film of scorching white, the illumination was snuffed out. She was left floating in eternity's deep with only the anxiety over what would come next.

The knowing.

Apprehension snapped her back into her body. Her legs felt fuzzy, like they did when she sat through back-to-back classes at Shaker High listening to a teacher drone on. Predictably, she couldn't move. Her skin grew clammy.

Zobie Marsh was an unwilling soothsayer of future events and a reluctant diviner of the past. Why she carried this burden was beyond comprehension. Instinct had kept her from sharing the facts surrounding her unusual powers with all but one confidante, now dead.

In the Camry's back seat, library books nestled beside an overused sleeping bag and a plastic bag stuffed with toiletries. Inexplicably, the neatly arranged contents were joined by a presence she felt as surely as her toes. Still she couldn't move. Even if she could, she wouldn't have found the courage to glance over her shoulder. The unseen force, sharp as a blade's tip, prodded the back of her neck.

*Pay attention.*

On a prayer, she shut her eyes.

There was no telling what the unseen force would reveal: snippets of events long past or random bits of the future. The knowing didn't come in a logical, sequential order; nor did it reliably show the emotional highlights of Zobie's life. Some important days

found their way into the visions but they were mixed in with a hodgepodge of other, more mundane days, an uneventful look back at Halloween during first grade or a look forward at a test-taking day soon to transpire in her last weeks at Shaker Heights High. Now she prayed for nothing more consequential than an inoffensive glimpse of the future, an argument she'd endure with her hard-drinking mother or something more benign, a peek at the high school graduation ceremony only weeks away. In truth she didn't mind what the knowing showed, past or future, as long as she wasn't shown the image of Black Gram or any difficult conversations about her that were sure to arise. Gram was irreplaceable, an amputation of the heart. The memory of her love blended with the grief shading Zobie's thoughts.

*Miss you, miss you, miss you.*

Eyes still closed, Zobie sucked in a startled breath.

This bout of knowing was unlike any encountered in a long and troubling past. The image wasn't a snapshot from Zobie's past or future. The image wasn't familiar at all. A column of colorful pebbles—a funnel cloud—danced above an empty desert that stretched into the horizon. The horizon wore the ghastly soot hue of pollution, the dirty air bereft of clouds. The faint illumination reaching the ground wasn't strong enough to support life, and miles of empty sand dunes stretched in every direction. A sense of inescapable loss accosted Zobie's senses.

Defying the emotion, she trained her out-of-body eyes, the expanded consciousness that came with the knowing, upon the graceful movement of the funnel cloud. The cloud reminded her of a maiden in a gauzy dress waltzing above the sand dunes, flirting with the barren ground below. *Touch down*, she thought with growing impatience. *Heal the earth.*

She wasn't in the habit of making requests during the unwanted visions but the instinct was a good one, and the funnel cloud, as if summoned by the wish, brought its whirling colors ever nearer. On closer inspection, the pebbles comprising the pretty rotation weren't pebbles at all. They were rose petals sparkling with dew, deep pinks and dark reds, salmon-hued petals as big as her fist and smaller white petals swirling wildly in the diminished light, light yellows and orange petals dancing with purple ones, thousands of petals—more. At jerky intervals, the otherworldly bouquet touched down on the empty

sands. On each place touched, a cluster of green shoots burst from the sands, a mossy bed from which further life would spring.

The buoyant sight zipped across her synapses. What was the message contained here? This was nothing like the other bouts of knowing that had dogged her since early childhood. There was more symbolism than fact in the sight, a message impossible to decode.

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